

021111 Velo Tour Luxembourg: Diekirch and Ettelbruck

I set out from Vianden with the expectation of arriving in the town of Diekirch in about an hour. My route took me back along the same trails that I had been on the day before, through the apple orchards and cow pastures that lay next to the River Our. I spotted my friends from Belgium walking along the road outside of Vianden and bid them a final farewell as I eyed the overcast sky. I reached the River Sure and turned my bike westward on a bike path that ran along the rivers edge. It had been drizzling on and off all morning, but eventually, it just began to pour. I luckily was near a bridge that spanned both the bicycle path and the river and so I stopped under its shelter from the rain. I was amazed that it was almost noon. I had badly underestimated the time required for the ride. I ate lunch under the bridge in hopes that the rain would soon end, but eventually I had to continue on in the downpour.

Fortunately, I was not too far from the town of Diekirch and before I knew it, I was pedaling into the pedestrian center of the town after a few lucky guesses as to the way to go. Diekirch is a pleasant little town with a big pedestrian mall in the center as well as being home to the country's main wartime museum and the largest brewery. Other attractions include a museum about the Gallo-Roman days of the town as well as places to rent bicycles and kayaks. Many years ago, the leaders of Diekirch had seen the value of the Ardennes for tourism and had been the first in Luxembourg to spearhead a campaign to promote their town.

According to my guidebook, I should have been able to find the tourist office and the museum close to each other. However, a half hour of wandering the city center had yielded no fruit (it was a fruitless search). I was getting terribly frustrated as the rain was continuing and the city center was not that large. Finally, I realized that I had overlooked the tourist office, but it had not mattered. The office was closed for two hours for lunch. I continued to wander and by going out of the center of the city, I stumbled upon signs to the military history museum where I was hoping to spend a few dry hours. I discovered the museum behind construction work on its main entrance and I carefully unloaded my bags under an overhang to avoid getting them wet.

I brought my bags inside the entrance and into a large room the size of a high school gymnasium which was full of military trucks, tanks and other equipment. I showed the man at the ticket booth my International Student ID to get a student discount and he was excited to see that I had come from Denmark where he had just been to watch a football match. I had to go back outside to use the bathroom and when I came back in he proudly showed me some Danish Krone which he still had in his wallet. I didn't have the heart to tell him that I was from the US.

The Musee National d'Histoire Militaire is dedicated primarily to the Battle of the Bulge and the museum tries to "present an objective historical representation of the military operations in the Ardennes from the US, German and civilian point of view". I can not say that the goal of being unbiased could be met since the people of Luxembourg were not very fond of the invaders but were excited to see the liberators. The hundreds of displays in English, German and French, do however tell the story from all viewpoints. There are over 1,500 square meters of exhibitions including some 1:1 scale mockups of operations during the war. What was more interesting to

me than the military hardware were the pictures of both the soldiers and the civilians who were trying to cope with the war. The destruction in Luxembourg was terrible and having seen many of the towns where battles were fought, it amazed me that the people were able to rebuild. What was also surprising was that during the battle, American and German soldiers were often buried side by side in shallow graves marked with crosses upon which the soldiers helmets were placed. The cold of winter prevented the digging of deep graves. After the war was over, the bodies were found and moved to two large cemeteries near Luxembourg City; one cemetery for the American soldiers and one for the German soldiers.

The museum also had models of the German V3 rocket which was intended to launch missiles for long distances. The barrel of the gun was basically a 130m long tube mounted on supports onto the side of a hill. The tube had a series of junctions shaped like upside down v's which allowed for additional charges to be set off as the projectile moved along the barrel. The display for the V3 was made because the Germans turned the V3 towards Luxembourg City during the war, lobbing dozens of missiles at the city. The missiles killed civilians and destroyed one of the steeples on the Notre Dame Cathedral, but were more of an annoyance since the weapon was difficult to aim precisely.

The displays also show the local perspective of the effects of the war in Diekirch. On December 19, 1944 the town was evacuated after the Germans were able to successfully bridge the river, allowing artillery to be moved within range of the town. The military vehicles and personal evacuated using the main road to Ettelbruck, but the civilians had to use back lanes and paths. Attention is also given to the resistance movement in Vianden as well as the role of the modern army in Luxembourg.

My hopes of the rain having ended during my walk through the museum were dashed when I got back outside to find it still coming down. My guide book had recommended spending a night in Diekirch, but I ignored this good advice in lieu of pressing on to Ettelbruck where there was a youth hostel. I had hoped to also be able to see the Chateau de Bourscheid located north of Ettelbruck. However, a lack of cycling paths in the area of the chateau meant that I would have to use the main roads. I was hesitant to do so since Luxembourg drivers are a bit apprehensive about passing bicycles and I would most likely have a long line of traffic behind me.

But, I hoped that the tourist office in Ettelbruck would be able to tell me of an alternative route to the chateau. Also in Ettelbruck is the General Patton Memorial Museum where I could spend a few more hours in the dry indoors until the hostel opened. I pedaled the few kilometers to Ettelbruck and soon realized my mistake. Ettelbruck is a nice city, but it is much larger than Diekirch and lacks the charm of the smaller town. I decided to leave the chateau till the next morning and after some wandering, I figured out where the General Patton Museum was located. I unloaded my bags off of my bike and went to the entrance to find that it was closed. The museum was only open on Sundays after October 1. Dismayed, I looked for the tourist office. Closed. So, now really dismayed and wet, I looked for the youth hostel. It is good that I did look early because misleading and nonexistent signs meant that it took me over an hour to find the hostel even though I knew approximately where it lay. The hostel was located a good distance from the city

center and up a flight of stairs that ascended up a hill and through several trees which hid the hostel from sight.

The hostel was not very nice and what made it worse was that it was damp from the constant downpour that would continue through the night. I checked into a dorm room and had it to myself for the night. Other guests included a whole contingent of Dutch students who were on a hike. I opted to eat dinner at the hostel rather than biking through the rain back into the city. After dinner I looked at all of my options for the next day. I had SMS's my friend Michele in Frankfurt and asked if I could show up a day early. (SMS's are text messages that can be sent and received by your mobile phone. I can SMS with friends in China, Indonesia and all over Europe. There are SMS's in the US, but not many people take advantage of them if they even have the option. Since my mobile works anywhere in Europe, sending SMS's was a great and inexpensive way to be in contact with Michele as my plans changed.) I decided that if I were going to go back to Luxembourg City on Thursday, then I might as well take the train to Frankfurt that night rather than to spend the night in a hostel and then to take the train the next morning. In the meanwhile, I still hoped to go to the chateau and then bike to Luxembourg City.

However, by the next morning, the rain was still coming down in buckets. I abandoned plans to bike to the chateau and instead planned to find a neat looking statue of Patton just emerging from the woods and surveying the valley below through his field glasses. After seeing the statue, I planned bike to Luxembourg City. I gladly left the youth hostel (there wasn't even coffee for breakfast!) and pedaled up to the statue, leading a procession of cars behind me in the rain. The statue of Patton was neat but the rain was worsening. At that point, I decided to just go a few towns away before taking the train to Luxembourg City. The bicycle path to Luxembourg City would eventually run along a few major roads and I didn't want to take the risk of riding next to nervous traffic in the rain. I cycled back into Ettelbruck with the intention of picking up the cycle route on the other side of the city. I had to pass the train station and at that point I decided that I had enough of the rain. I bought a ticket for my bike and myself to Luxembourg City for €4 rather than to continue on to the next town.

Once on the train, I SMSed Michele to ask if it were ok if I came early with the plan of killing time in Luxembourg City until she was ready for me to arrive. She sent back that I could come right away which was nice of her. The train to Luxembourg City only took twenty minutes and it was a really neat way to approach the city. The train tracks are laid on viaducts which ring the city and offer great views. I arrived at the train station, purchased a ticket to Frankfurt for €54, threw my bags into left luggage and went into town to return my rented bicycle. I scurried about to take some last pictures and that it was not yet raining in Luxembourg City caused me to question my choice to leave. However, the rain did come before I had the chance to get back to the train station which was a relief of sorts that I had chosen wisely. It was really sad to leave the country early after having such a good few days of riding, but the rain had made the cycling with my bags and maps not a whole lot of fun.

 [Previous](#) | [Next](#)  | [Return to Main Page](#)

Copyright © 2002 Jeffrey Mahn. All rights reserved. This or any other written materials from this web site may not be used in part or in whole without the prior permission from Jeffrey Mahn.