

Gottschee trip during the Gottscheer Culture Week 2022

Searching for traces in the "old homeland and in the "resettlement area".

Hermann Leustik

During the preparations for the 55th Gottscheer Kulturwoche 2022, the board of the Gottscheer Landsmannschaft Klagenfurt, as organisers of the Kulturwoche, decided to extend this year's Gottschee trip by one day to a three-day excursion.

This was due to the fact that the Gottscheer Culture Week and thus also the annual Gottschee trip could not take place for two years because of the Corona restrictions.

In the search for a tour guide to plan, develop and lead the itinerary, I was asked by the board to take on this task. They believed to have found in me a person who knew both the Gottscheerland and the resettlement area in Lower Styria to a sufficient degree.

Since I assumed that I myself could learn a lot about both areas through the preparations for the trip, I gladly took on the task of leading the tour.

While the planning of the routes in Gottscheerland was not a particular challenge for me, it proved to be somewhat more difficult for the resettlement area. Here it was necessary to find attractive and above all informative places, as I wanted to offer the participants something special.

In preparation for the trip, I took the time twice to explore the area in my own car and to find people who would make themselves available for guided tours on site or to find restaurants capable of serving regional food to 50 people without long waiting times.

After that, there were still many phone calls to make to coordinate dates.

Then, on 2 August 2022, the time had come.

1st day of travel: Tuesday, 2 August 2022:

Before 7 o'clock in the morning, the tour participants gradually arrived at the car park in Krastowitz Castle. Due to cancellations due to illness, our travel group had shrunk to 38 people, so we had enough space in the bus. As all the years before, we had chosen the bus company Hofstätter from Treibach as our travel company. The bus driver Peter (Hartl) was to drive us through Slovenia for three days.

We started our journey just after 7 am. After a short diversions through the city of Klagenfurt, Mrs. Maria Michitsch was picked up unscheduled, we drove towards **Rosental** and the **Loibl Pass**.

After the tour guide welcomed the participants, he explained that in 1958 a famous Gottscheer, Karl Stalzer from New York, was certainly one of the first Gottscheers after the Second World War to travel the same route towards his old homeland, Gottschee. And Stalzer filmed this journey from Maria Rain with a 16mm film camera. He captured the Rosental, the Loiblal and his entire journey through the Gottschee on film. Through his film we know today what the Gottscheerland looked like fifteen years after the resettlement - abandoned, destroyed and meadows and fields, but also villages already largely overgrown. At that time, he still had to drive over the 1368 m high **Loiblpass**, which is now closed to tourist traffic. Since 1963, the 1570 m long **Loibl Tunnel** at 1068 m above sea level has been open to traffic and was the most important road connection to Slovenia until the opening of the Karawanken Tunnel.



Photo 1: Heading for the old homeland

After crossing the tunnel, we drove past the village of **Neumarktl** / Trcic, already back in the valley. This place, like Gottschee, was a German-speaking island in Carniola for a long time, until it was Sloveneised. In 1492 Emperor Frederick III granted the settlement the right to hold markets, and in the same year he also granted the Gottscheer the peddler's patent, which was so vital for them. For over 300 years until the 1980s, the village was known for its shoe industry, in which some Gottscheer families also found work after the First World War.

Via the motorway past the provincial **capital Ljubljana**, we continued on the main road towards Gottschee to the first rest stop in **Auersperg** / Turjak.



Photo 2: Auersperg Palace



Photo 3: Coffee break at the Auersperg service area

The rest stop is exactly on the same level as Auersperg Castle, which is the historical ancestral seat of the old Austrian noble Auersperg family. The castle was built in 1067, destroyed several times, but always rebuilt. It survived an earthquake in 1511 and also the Turkish Wars. The castle was then rebuilt into a palace and unfortunately partially destroyed during the Second World War. At present, the stately castle is still being restored, but parts of it are already in public use again.

At 10:00 am, the journey continued towards (Ober-)Mösel, our next stop. Via **Reifnitz**, the **Schweineberg** as the gateway to the Gottscheerland, the villages in the Gottscheer Oberland - **Oberloschin** [Gonje Lozine] (31 / 33 = **31 houses 1941, 33 houses 1992**), **Unterloschin** [Spodnje Lozine] (16 / 13) and **Neuloschin** [Nove Lozine] (14 / 10), **Koflern** [Koblerje] (53 / 69), **Ort** [Konca vas] (24 / 27), **Windischdorf** [Slovenska vas] (61 / 72), **Mitterdorf** [Stara cerkev] (46 / 73) , **Kerndorf** (46 / 53) and outside the town of **Gottschee** [Kocevje] (292 / 1262). We wanted to visit the town of Gottschee and its surroundings only on the third day on our way home. After continuing through **Grafenfeld** [Dolga vas] (86 / 197) and **Lienfeld** [Livold] (67 / 108) we reached the town of **Obermösel** [Moselj] (89 / 45).



Foto 1: Die Kirche in Mösel

Here in **Mösel** we wanted to visit the church, which Mr Bojan Kuzma had kindly unlocked for us. Our faithful liaison from the town of Gottschee, Mr Miha Petrovic, son of the former mayor, had arranged this at my request.

The first church in Mösel was certainly built around 1360, but it was probably destroyed by a violent earthquake in 1511. Mösel was elevated to a parish in 1509, and in 1520 a new church was built, which was rebuilt and enlarged in 1750. The well-preserved parish church, dedicated to St. Leonhard, still exists today.

At 10:50 a.m. the journey continued through the **Gottscheer Unterland** and **the Lower Side** in the direction of **Tschernembl** [Črnomelj]. We crossed an area where a number of larger Gottscheer villages were located before the resettlement. It was not possible to drive along this route in the weeks before the journey, as construction work including roadblocks were constantly taking place on the roads in this area. A week before the journey I was informed that the road between Bresowitz [Brezovica] and Maierle was closed and that we would have to drive south via Predgrad and the river Kulpa over former Slovenian territory. The day before

our departure we received the news that the road via Vornschloss was closed and that we could now drive through the area of the Gottscheer villages.

The journey then went through the former Gottscheer villages of **Reinthal** [Raindol] (41 houses before 1941 / 8 houses after 1992), **Römergrund** (13 / 0), **Graflinden** [Knežja Lipa] (44 / 7), **Bresowitz** [Brezovica] (20 / 3). From here, according to earlier information, the journey would have gone via **Saderz** (15 / 0) past **Predgrad** across the Kulpa to **Tschernembl** [Črnomelj].

The journey continued, however, as originally planned, via former Gottscheer villages such as **Unterdeutschau** [Nemška loka] (41 / 10), where the ruins of the parish church still stand.

Unterdeutschau had the second largest, two-towered parish and pilgrimage church in Gottscheerland. It was built in 1763 and was known far beyond the Gottscheer borders as the pilgrimage church of Mariatrost. It had 4 bells. It was only blown up in 1951.



Photo 5: The adventurous gravel road from Unterdeutschau to Maierle

We continued without stopping on a partly adventurous gravel road via **Unterbuchberg** [Dolnja Bukova gora] (13 / 0), **Bistritz** [Bistrica] (25 / 2), of which today one of the two houses is the Lackner Inn. Then we passed **Maierle** [Mavlen] (45 / 16) to the town of **Tschernembl** [Črnomelj], which is no longer in Gottscheer territory.

Today Tschernembl is a town with about 6000 inhabitants, the old town centre lies elevated on a narrow embankment between the rivers Lahinja and Dobljica. Together with the municipalities of Semitsch and Metlika to the north of the Gottschee, the town lies in the White Carniola [Bela karajina] region.

I had booked a German-speaking guide as a tour guide through the tourist office, who was to show us the most interesting buildings of the town in half an hour.

We got off at the main square, where we started the city tour with the guide Janez Weiss. On the north-east side of the main square is Chernembl Castle, which now houses the municipal administration. Before the Second World War, the castle was run as a hotel and was called Hotel Lackner.



Photo 6: The former castle in Tschernembl



Photo 7: The parish church of St. Peter in Tschernembl

Afterwards, we were introduced to some more buildings, including the former monastery (now the seat of the district court) and the bank building opposite the castle, the museum, the Gothic-style Filial Church of the Holy Spirit, which was rebuilt in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the 17th-century parish church of St. Peter.

Afterwards, we went to lunch at the **Müller Restaurant**, also in the city centre, located on the Lahinja River.



Photo 8: The Müller Inn in Tschernembl



Photo 9: The beautiful dining room at Restaurant Müller

Already on the journey, we had the opportunity to choose from three offered menus - leg of lamb, trout fillet or roast veal, each with interesting local side dishes, three different offered soups and a sweet dessert. I then gave the corresponding number of menus to Mrs Müller by mobile phone. An exceptionally nice, very appealing restaurant, even for such a large tour group, where we were spoiled with excellent food.

The owners, the Müller family, were very obliging and friendly, and the service was also excellent. A restaurant to recommend to everyone.

At 15:30 we continued our journey north via the wine-growing community of Semic. Soon we passed the border into Gottscheerland and reached the Moschnitze. To the left the first former Gottscheer village **Russbach** [Blatnik] (24 / 3), then **Wretzen** [Brezovica] (25 / 0), before we stopped at the church in **Mitterdorf near Tschermoschnitz** [Srednja vas] (31 / 21).



Photo 10: The church in Mitterdorf near Tschermoschnitz



Photo 11: Hermann Leustik, the tour guide welcomes Hans Jaklitsch

There the well-known Gottscheer Hans Jaklitsch was already waiting for us, who had agreed to unlock not only the church in Mitterdorf but also the church in Tschermoschnitz and show it to us. Hans Jaklitsch's family did not take part in the resettlement in 1941 and remained in Gottschee.

The Gottscheer Old Settlers' Association from Krapflern succeeded in preserving the 17th century Filial Church of Saints Philip and James, which was in need of major renovation, as one of the few remaining Gottscheer churches for posterity. Among other things, it has received a new roof.



Photo 13: The church in Tschermoschnitz



Photo 14: Tschermoschnitz Church - the nave

After a short drive we reached **Tschermoschnitz** [Črmošnjice] (26 / 33), where we visited the parish church with its spire at the eastern end of the village, again with explanations by Hans Jaklitsch. Tschermoschnitz had only 26 houses before the resettlement, but had five inns and three general stores - what a contrast to today.

The next way led us to the cultural centre of the **Altsiedlerverein** in **Krapflern** [Občice] (32 / 21), which was developed into a Gottscheer cultural centre with the support of domestic and foreign supporters, including the Carinthian provincial government. A large delegation of the association was waiting for us. Not only drinks, coffee and pobolitza awaited us, but also a harmonica-playing chairman Marian Stangel with his wife and Urschi Kopp.



Photo 15: The reception committee of the Old Settlers' Association. From left: Urschi Kopp, Marian Stangl, Mrs. Stangl and others.



Photo 16: A warm welcome in Krapflern

After singing Gottscheer songs together, it was time to say goodbye and we drove only a short distance to **Pöllandl** [Poljane] (64 / 35), where we visited the association house of another Gottscheer association in the Moschnitze. Maridi and Andreas Tscherne welcomed us to the **Moschnitze facility** [Zavod Moschnitze], where Maridi told us about the association.



Photo 17: The clubhouse and the church in Pöllandl



Photo 18: Tour participants in front of the clubhouse in Pöllandl

After that it was time to drive via the spa town of **Töplitz** [Dolenjske Toplice] and the town of **Rudolfswerth** [Novo Mesto] towards our accommodation, the Hotel Sport in **Otočec**.

After moving into our rooms, we deserved dinner. There was an extensive offer at the buffet, which tasted excellent.

The fact that it had been a long and apparently exhausting day that we had completed was evident from the fact that hardly any of the tour participants were to be seen at the bar in the hall on the ground floor after dinner.

2nd travel day: Wednesday, 3 August 2022

Due to the extensive programme on this day, the participants had to have breakfast quite early, as we had set a departure time of 8:30 am.

The destination of today was the so-called Lower Styria, the "new" home of the Gottscheer after the resettlement from Gottschee in 1941.

The first place we wanted to visit that day was the town of **Rann** [Brežice]. Rann was one of the three places where the Gottscheer arrived in Lower Styria by train during the resettlement. Our journey took us along the motorway in the direction of Zagreb. South of Rann we left the motorway at the village of **Tschatesch** [Čatez], where Elfi Hönigmann (née Hoefflerle - today New York) and Horst Krauland (today Klagenfurt) were born.



Photo 19: Tschatesch seen from the east



Photo 20: We cross the Sava at the confluence with the Gurk (Krka).

We crossed the bridge at the confluence of the Gurk [Krka] and Sava [Save] rivers to arrive after a few minutes at the southern end of the main square of **Rann**. We parked the bus in front of the **castle in Rann** and walked the few metres to the entrance of the castle, where the German-speaking guide, whom I had already met on one of my previous visits, was already waiting for us.



Photo 21: The castle in Rann



Photo 22: Anja Moritz, Bastian Kolar the museum guide and Hermann Leustik at the welcome in front of the castle

Mr Bastian Kolar welcomed us at the entrance, where Anja Moric from Mitterdorf near Gottschee surprised us. As chance would have it, she was participating in a symposium at the castle at the time of our visit. Anja is certainly known to all Gottscheer, as she has been dealing with Gottscheer history for years, although she is not a born Gottscheer. Among other things,

she has made a film about the Gottscheer culture of remembrance and organised an exhibition about Gottschee in several places, including Klagenfurt.

We visited the rooms of the castle, including the so-called Knights' Hall with its magnificent ceiling paintings, and saw an exhibition that also deals with the resettlement of Slovenes and with the settlement by Gottscheer in 1941.



Photo 23: Introductory words by Bastian Kolar



Photo 24: Bastian Kolar guides us through the exhibition



Photo 25: The Knights' Hall



Photo 26: The main square from the Rann, the water tower on the right.

Not all participants liked the way history was presented in this exhibition, and there was some criticism. History in particular can be viewed from different sides and often provokes contradictions. After visiting the magnificent castle in the centre of the city, a short coffee break was in order.

Then we headed towards the Croatian border to the village of **Kapellen** [Kapele] where we parked our bus at the village square, which is lined with the church, the abandoned primary schools, the vicarage and a closed restaurant. Here, the mayor, the priest and a German-speaking local were already waiting for us.



Photo 27: Ivan Urek, the mayor, the priest, the German-speaking resident, and Hermann Leustik.



Photo 28: Hermann Leustik at the welcoming ceremony, the laying of the wreath at the cemetery and the escort.

After a friendly greeting, I had already met the gentlemen during one of my visits, we headed for our first destination, **the cemetery of Kapellen**. Before that I had already fetched a small wreath from the bus, which we had taken with us from Klagenfurt and which had survived the journey to Kapellen excellently.

I had arranged with the Gottscheer Landsmannschaft Klagenfurt to lay a wreath on a grave in Kapellen and we wanted to commemorate all those Gottscheer who had died in the resettlement area and subsequently during the expulsion and flight.

I had chosen the grave of Magdalena Eppich, who died on 28 December 1941, only 14 days after arriving in the resettlement area. Magdalena Eppich was the mother of Maria Eppich. Maria was married to Johann Hoefflerle, one of the two postmasters before the resettlement in Altlag. Magdalena Eppich is in turn the grandmother of Joe Hoefflerle, who is married to Elfi Hönigmann, born in Catez, and now lives in New York.

I explained the circumstances of the wreath-laying and the relationship to the participants and called for a minute's silence. After I had laid the wreath at the grave together with Hermann Petschauer, the priest blessed the wreath and we said a prayer together.



Photo 29: Hermann Petschauer and Hermann Leustik with the wreath



Photo 30: The wreath after the ceremony on the grave of Magdalena Eppich

The fact that the grave of Magdalena Eppich still exists, although she was a Gottscheerin, is thanks to a family Urek from Kapellen. The grandmother Urek, who was a friend of the Eppich / Hoefflerle family, had already taken care of the grave after 1945 and also always paid for it. Afterwards her daughter took over the care and also her granddaughter Bozana, a

businesswoman, keeps up the tradition, maintains and pays for the grave. For this we Gottscheer may especially thank the Urek family, because they keep alive the memory of the Gottscheer in this area.

After the cemetery we visited the church, which is currently being renovated. It was severely damaged in an earthquake in 2020, which also claimed lives in Croatia around Zagreb.



Photo 31: The primary school and the church in Kapellen



Photo 32: The tour group at the film screening in the primary school

Our next destination was the abandoned **primary schools**, which is currently being developed as the municipality's cultural centre. The mayor, Ivan Urek, who is related but not related to the aforementioned Ureks, invited us into a hall where he showed us a short film about a nature reserve located in the valley east of the municipality, directly on the border with Croatia.

Afterwards, together with the mayor, I was able to show a treasure in the form of a local map from 1942, measuring about 1.5 x 1 metre. This village map is interesting for us Gottscheer in that it assigns all Gottscheer families who immigrated to the village of Kapellen in 1941/1942 to the individual houses in the village. The names of the heads of the families are noted next to the respective houses. Over thirty Gottscheer families had found a new home in Kapellen for a few years until their hasty flight.



Photo 33: Hermann Leustik with the map of Kapellen from 1942



Photo 34: As a token of gratitude and appreciation, Mayor Urek also received a medicine from Carinthia as a farewell gift

Afterwards, the mayor invited us for wine and other drinks. It was difficult to say goodbye to all those who had travelled with us, as we had made friends in this place.

The journey continued to the next village, **Verhje** [Vrhje]. There I wanted to visit Mr. Ivan Urek (same name as the mayor, but not related) in his house with the travel group. He usually lives in Zagreb, but we had arranged by phone that he would wait for us in Vrhje that day.

The reason for the visit was that I wanted to follow up on a rumour that Mr Johann Hoefflerle, the postmaster, had come to Kapellen by stagecoach during the resettlement from Altlag and that this coach still existed. But it then turned out that Mr Urek really does own a carriage, a carriage for racehorses, but unfortunately not the old stagecoach from Altlag. This meant that I and all the other participants had to bury their hopes of seeing this old piece of cultural heritage.

As lunch time was long past, we had to make sure we got to our lunch. To this end, we continued via **Rann**, crossed the Sava River, took a diversion through the village of **Catez** to reach **Velike Malenze** south of the river Gurk [Krka].

We saw this place only from the bus because of the advanced time. We stopped at a farmhouse that still looks as if we were in the 50s. The farm has not been renovated or repaired for ages. After the resettlement in 1941, Frank Mausser's family lived in this farmhouse until 5 May 1945.



Photo 35: The farm in Velike Malenze was home to the Mausser family



Photo 36: The Gliebe family lived in the house next door from January 1945.

We drove a little further along the farm and saw a blue outbuilding. The Gliebe family from Altlag - my grandparents with my mother and the other children - lived in this outbuilding from the beginning of January 1945 until they fled. In January 1945 they had to flee from their house in Globocice, in the southernmost village in the resettlement area directly on the border to Croatia, because they were constantly confronted with partisan raids and life there was becoming too unsafe. The Mausser family accommodated the entire Gliebe family in the outbuilding where they lived until they fled. Since the partisans had already stolen all the Gliebe family's livestock, the Mausser family put one of their cows in the Gliebe family's stable.

Now we continued in the direction of **Globocice**, where we wanted to visit the Tomse family's estate, where I had ordered lunch for the tour group.

This farm, at the house it had always been called **Martinovi**, was the "new" home for the Gliebe family from Neulag (near Altlag), for my grandparents and their children, from the end of 1941 to the beginning of January 1945. Maria and Matthias Gliebe had four children - Erna, Maria (my mother), Josef and Gottfried.



Photo 37: "Martinovi" - the Gliebe family home from November 1941 to January 1945 in Globocice



Photo 38: The Gliebe family - Erna, Gottfried, mother Maria, father Matthias, Maria (my mother) and Josef Gliebe in front of their house in Globocice in 1942.

The former Slovenian owners, who had been resettled in 1941, have turned this farm, which my grandparents had left in an exemplary tidy state in 1945, into an exemplary farm. In addition to cattle breeding, they also run three vineyards. Next to the old wooden house they built a new building where they live today. A few years ago they renovated the old house in an exemplary manner, added a hall and turned it into a farm inn. The family can cater for up to 80 people at a time.



Photo 39: Franc, the host serves the starter



Photo 40: The tour group at lunch

The lunch, consisting of soup, a plate for 6 people with different kinds of meat, struklji (a kind of cooked curd strudel), potatoes, vegetables and salad was excellent. One could assume that the house's own wine and schnapps would not be missing. Afterwards, Milena, the boss of the house, offered her own agricultural products for sale, Franc, the master of the house, took us into his wine cellar, and fellow travellers had a few bottles of wine in their luggage.



Photo 41: Excellent food - one plate for 6 people



Photo 42: The tour group at lunch

With a heavy heart, but with the appropriate pressure, I had to urge them to continue, as our schedule had not quite kept.

We took a new route through **Catez** and crossed the Sava again in the direction of **Brezice**. We then drove through various villages where Gottscheer had once lived everywhere. The next destination was **Gurkfeld** [Krsko], also a place that had a railway station where Gottscheer arrived in 1941. We only passed through the village of Gurkfeld, which today has grown together with the former village of Hasenfeld, as it has no special centre with corresponding sights.

We changed to the southern side of the Sava riverbank, drove a few kilometres upstream and changed back to the northern Sava riverbank in **Reichenburg** [Brestanica]. Here we wanted to go to Reichenburg, a castle situated directly above the Sava. During my exploratory visit to the castle, I had arranged a German guide for the group, who was Tara Janjanin. We explored parts of the castle, visited an exhibition and watched a film about the resettlement of the Slovenes. Here too, as in Rann, there were expressions of displeasure about the view of history. I myself had to point out to the guide that the resettled Slovenes got their property back in most cases after the war, while the Gottscheer were left with nothing after flight and expulsion and received no compensation from the Slovenian state.



Photo 43: Reichenburg Castle



Photo 44: Tara Janjanin begins the tour

Reichenburg Castle also has a connection to resettlement. Here, in 1941, the German Wehrmacht set up a collection camp that every Slovene from the area had to pass through to wait for resettlement. Since the Slovenes already knew at the beginning of 1941 that they would be resettled, many took flight and fled to Italy. The Germans wanted to counteract this with the camp. Up to 100,000 Slovenes were resettled, mainly to Serbia, Silesia, but also to Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg.



Photo 45: The film about the resettlement of the Slovenes is viewed



Photo 46: View from the castle upstream to the narrow Sava valley

After 1945, the Reichenburg became a penal camp for Slovenian citizens who were not loyal to the regime.

My itinerary actually envisaged that the next place to be visited would be **Lichtenwald** [Sevnica]. Lichtenwald was also one of the villages with a railway station where the Gottscheer arrived during the resettlement in 1941. Like many places on the Sava River, Lichtenwald can also boast a beautiful castle.

However, after hearing from participants that they were born nearby, in the village of **Arch** [Raka], I changed the itinerary at short notice. Mrs Maria Michitsch travelled with her two sisters, Gabriela Plut from Munich and Gertrud Perz with her husband Siegfried from the USA, who were both born in Arch. We drove upstream the Sava for some time, soon turning south and crossing quite hilly terrain to arrive after 20 minutes in the village of Arch. A house still labelled with the German name Arch welcomed us next to the double-towered church, in the middle of the village.



Photo 47: House next to the church in Arch with German inscription



Photo 48: The three sisters in front of the parish church in Arch

The three sisters were happy to share a photo with the church in the background. I am also happy that I was able to fulfil their wish to visit their birthplace once again.

Afterwards we continued southwards to the motorway, where we drove towards Ljubljana to our Hotel Sport in **Otočec**.

After dinner, some of the participants got up to visit the nearby Otočec Castle.



Photo 49: Otocec Castle on Sava Island

It is located on an island in the river Gurk (Krka). The castle has long been home to a hotel, where I stayed 55 years ago with my parents on the occasion of a visit to Lower Styria. It was converted into a 5* hotel a few years ago.

3rd travel day: Thursday, 4 August 2022

Today the bus set off at 9:00 am. Otto Tripp and his son had arrived in the morning with their own car and joined the group.

The plan for today was to visit the centre of the Gottscheerland. We drove past **Rudolfswerth** [Novo Mesto] and after a few kilometres to the north we reached the village of Ainöd [Soteska]. Today, the ruins of Ainöd Castle, the remains of the Auersperg castle, are located in this village. The stately castle, which Valvassor described as one of the most beautiful castles in the Duchy of Carniola, was burnt down by partisans in 1943 and used as a quarry after the end of the war. Some parts of the castle are still preserved.

We continued along the river Gurk [Krka] upstream in the direction of **Seisenberg** [Žužemberk]. In **Hof** [Dvor] we turned left towards Gottschee. Here we could still see the ruins of the former Auersperg industrial enterprises, the hammer mill and the iron foundry.

On a steep road we reached the first Gottscheer village **Langenton** [Smuka] (77 / 13). The Gottscheer also called this place Zmuk. We stopped here and looked at the memorial plaques erected by the Peter Koseler Verein (chairman DI Erik Krisch) in German, English and Slovenian language to. The place is depicted in writing and pictures as it was before the resettlement in 1941.



Photo 50: The tour group stops at Langenton



Photo 51: Tour participants in front of the memorial plaque in Langenton

After driving on, we passed the village of **Neulag** [Novi log] (29 / 0), which was about 300 m north of the road. Today there is not a single house left in this village, in many cases only the foundation walls can be seen.

At the entrance to **Altlag** [Stari log] (123 / 20) we stopped and looked from the bus at the former fire station, which is still intact today, looked at the Lacke (small pond), in which there is no more water today and imagined the houses of the Mausser, Hönigmann, König etc. families on the right, because none of these houses are standing today. On the left of the road, some houses have survived, houses of inhabitants who did not resettle and were mostly married to a Slovenian or a Slovenian woman.



Photo 52: Entrance to Altlag from the south



Photo 53: In the middle of the village of Altlag the dried-up Lacke

Then we went directly to the cemetery. We entered the graveyard, which is now only half the size it was before 1941. To my delight, I could see that a lot had changed at the cemetery since my last visit. In the summer of 2020, Frank Mausser and I were here at the cemetery and we cleaned some graves together. Frank can still visit the gravestone of his grandparents here, I myself appreciate that the gravestone of my great-grandmother Maria Hönigmann is still there in very good condition. Frank and I have asked 2020 people from the village to clean fallen gravestones again, fix them and put them up again.



Photo 54: The renovated cemetery in Altlag



Photo 55: The gravestone of Elfi Hoefflerle's grandmother and Hermann Leustik's great-grandmother.

Now, after two years, I was particularly pleased to see that some of the residents of Altlag, especially Joze Turk, the current tenant of the agricultural land in Altlag, have done a good job. Joize Turk himself comes from the neighbouring village of Hinje, about 5 km from Altlag. In summer he lives here in Altlag and he has built himself a new house on the foundation walls of house no. 4 (Vauainsch), owner was Georg Krische. Frank Mausser, Elfi Hoefflerle from New York and myself paid for the renovation at the cemetery. It was a matter of the heart for all three of us.

From Altlag we continued towards Gottschee, passing the former villages of **Kletsch** [Kleče] (22 / 0) and **Malgern** [Mala Gora] (57 / 2). A memorial plaque has also been erected by the Peter Kosler Association in Malgern, where the village lay on both sides of the road.

We wanted to reach Mitterdorf via the next village **Obrern** [Gorenje] (35 / 78). Due to a construction site, we were not allowed to pass through Obrern, so we could not drive past the chapel that the Rom family from Spittal an der Drau had built. Mrs. Rom came from Obrern.



Photo 56: The church in Mitterdorf (Stara Cerkev)



Photo 57: Service in the church of Mitterdorf, held by Harald Tripp

Via a diversion we reached **Mitterdorf** [Stara Cerkev] (46 / 73). The church was open, as the outgoing priest Mitija Bulic had promised. Here in this church we wanted to celebrate mass.

Since the previous parish priest Bulic had left the parish on 31 July 2020, but the newly appointed parish priest does not want to take up the position at present, Harald Tripp, Otto Tripp's son, had followed the tour group with his father and his own car to read the mass. Father and son Petrovic had also joined the group in Mitterdorf and devoutly followed the service.



Photo 58: Group photo in front of the church in Mitterdorf



Photo 59: The house of Anja Moritz's family, right next to the church. Before 1941, it was the house of the Primosch family.

From Mitterdorf we drove directly to the very well-known **Falkenau Inn**, where we Gottscheer had often stopped before.



Photo 60: Lunch at the Falkenau Inn



Photo 61: Former mayor Michael Petrovic and his son Miha also did us the honour at lunch

We had the usual regional menu - soup, roast pork with Wiener schnitzel, roast potatoes and rice. The meal was rounded off with a dessert and, for some, a digestive schnapps.

The rest of the route back home was via Malgern to **Ebental** [Polom] (38 / 19). Ebental is for me one of the best preserved Gottscheer villages (apart from the villages in the Suchener Hochtal). However, Ebental can score with its long village structure as a street village, moreover, it has a beautiful tree avenue through the entire village.

Even before the trip, I had learned that the three sisters travelling with me, two of them born in Arch, were keen to visit the village of Rieg, as their parents came from this village. Before the trip I had tried to find a taxi in Gottschee with which the sisters could travel from Mitterdorf to Rieg and then return to the Falkenau inn. Unfortunately, I found that there was no taxi in Gottschee, but also no Go-Mobil.

So I decided to change the itinerary and drive via Rieg and the hinterland towards home.

The attempt to visit the town of Gottschee including the town parish church failed, because Miha Petrovic told me that the main street in the town was being rebuilt and that it was not possible for a bus to pass through the town.

So we drove past the outside of the town of Gottschee, passed the villages of **Grafenfeld** [Dolga vas] (86 / 197) and **Lienfeld** [Livold] (67 / 108), both very well preserved Gottscheer villages, which still looked like the Gottscheer had left them in the 90s of the previous century - unkempt, left to decay and without any investment. Today, colour has been added to these villages and there are very well-maintained houses. Then we went up the **Stalzer mountain**, from where we had a very good view of **Obermösel** [Gorenji Mozelj], **Hasenfeld** [Zajcja vas] and **Schwarzenbach** [Crni potok]. We drove past **Stalzern** [Štalcarji] (41 / 37) to stop immediately afterwards at the former cemetery of **Hinterberg** [Novi laze] (67 / 27).



Photo 62: The cemetery of Hinterberg



Photo 63: The memorial cross at Hinterberg cemetery

There are hardly any Gottscheer gravestones left, if there are, they lie on the ground. A new wooden cross was erected by the Gottscheer Altsiedlerverein to commemorate the deceased Gottscheer.

After a few minutes we reached **Rieg** [Kocevka reka] (101 / 53). The ancestors of the three sisters were from Rieg and the two sisters who were born in Arch were eager to visit the old homeland of their ancestors once again. We were able to fulfil their wish and were happy about it with them.



Photo 64: The village street in Rieg towards the north



Photo 65: The former hotel in Rieg

We went to the church, I managed to get the key for the church from neighbours and thus a visit to the church was possible even without prior registration.



Photo 66: The newly built church in Rieg



Photo 67: The modern nave in Rieg

After that we drove through the hinterland. We passed through **Göthenitz** [Gotenica] (108 / 0), whereby the place is still a restricted area today. Until a few years ago, the entire hinterland was designated as a restricted area. There are tunnels built by the military here, Tito even wanted to build a bunker for fighter planes including an airfield. Today, the tunnels house part of the National Archives of Slovenia.

We continued towards **Masern** (Grcarice) (61 / 49), the last Gottscheer village in the hinterland. Johann Sbaschnig, one of our fellow travellers, told us a few things about the village, as he was born here.

We now left the Gottscheerland and drove via **Reifnitz** [Ribnica], **Auersperg** [Turjak] and **Laibach** [Lublijana] towards home. We stopped for a short rest at the motorway service area before **Krainburg**. The plan to stop at Hotel Martinschek in Naklo failed due to lack of space. Two buses were registered before us.

After a drive through the **Loibl tunnel**, we soon reached the starting point of our bus trip in **Klagenfurt**. A wonderful, eventful and above all accident-free journey through partly unknown territory in Slovenia had thus come to an end.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the fellow travellers for their great discipline and above all for keeping to the set times, which made the work of the tour guide much easier. Thanks also for your perseverance during my explanations during the journey.

We will definitely see each other again in a year's time at the latest.

In the meantime, if you want to be comprehensively informed about Gottschee, then browse through <https://www.gottschee.at> as preparation for the next trip - enjoy it.

Hermann Leustik - Tour Guide

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