

Paul Mundy, Evelyn Mathias, Oliver Mundy

✉ address	Weizenfeld 4, 51467 Bergisch Gladbach, Germany	✉ email	paulmundy@netcologne.de
☎ tel	+49-2202-932 921		evelynmathias@netcologne.de
☎ fax	+49-2202-932 922	🌐 website	http://www.netcologne.de/~nc-mundypa

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"Make it short", said Evelyn. "No-one wants to read all your boring jokes." So here it is. It's rather long: skip to the end if you want to avoid the jokes.

January

NAIROBI, KENYA—Some friends and I stopped just inside the gate of Nairobi National Park to look at a group of lions by the roadside: three lionesses and four cubs. They looked underfed: most of the zebras and gazelles had crossed the river which forms the park boundary, and lion cubs can't swim. Another car had also found the lions: a note-taking researcher in a Land Rover. He signalled to us to turn our engine off because it was disturbing the lions. We watched for a while, then it was time to go... but our engine didn't start. We toyed with the idea of getting out to push, but decided against it: the lions did look distinctly peckish. Fortunately we were able to persuade the researcher to use his car to bump-start us from behind. We were careful not to stop the engine again.



Dunnottar Castle, Scotland

March

BAMAKO, MALI—My first visit to Francophone Africa. Perhaps the most colourful street life anywhere: crowds of Bambara women and men in brightly coloured, flowing robes; Tuareg from the north in long, light-blue jalabas; and lots of unhappy-looking sheep. They were headed for Tabaski, the Muslim Feast of the Sacrifice, when it is a generally bad time to be a sheep. The few survivors looked a lot more relaxed after the feast.

May

YANGON, MYANMAR—Want to buy gems? Yangon is the place to go. Saucers piled high with cut-priced rubies and emeralds adorn the jewellery stores in the central market. Fortunately, they didn't tempt me. Evelyn is cheap to keep: she doesn't wear jewellery.

Our neighbour in Germany thinks I'm on holiday when I travel. I'm not. In Myanmar, I ran workshops to produce agricultural extension materials: titles like "Conserving animal manure" and "Preventing and treating roundworm in pigs". Burmese has its own alphabet, which looks like lots of mating bubbles. Software companies haven't been able to agree on a single standard for the fonts, so a text on one computer turns into gobbledegook on a different machine. I couldn't tell the difference, though, as I can't read a word of Burmese.

July

DAVOS, SWITZERLAND—This trip was for a holiday. Evelyn loves walking in the mountains, but only if the path is as wide as a six-lane motorway and has a high wall between the walkers and any cliff. We classified the paths we walked along into three: "normal" (which we marked in green on the map), "complaining" (orange), and "refused" (red), which Oliver and I had to walk alone. We walked something like 80 km during the week; of that, 2½ km were coloured orange, and about 1 km (to the very top of a mountain) were red. Strange: at the time it seemed like more.

August

TOMNAVOULIN, SCOTLAND—The signposts were clear, but they didn't make the choice any easier. To the right the sign pointed to the Glenfiddich whisky distillery; to the left was the equally mouth-watering home of Glenlivet. Regine (Evelyn's sister) and I had secretly planned a detour to pass through the home of Scottish whisky. Evelyn twigged that it wasn't entirely by chance only after we turned off the main road and headed towards Glenlivet. Forget all that romantic tosh about bright mountain streams: the distillery was not a bunch of tartan-clad clansmen lovingly burning peat under their still, but a rather ugly factory. The tour was interesting, though, especially as it ended with a sample of the product. Well worth plotting the detour.

If there's an area that cries out for the harmonisation of European Union rules, it's in shower design. Each bed-and-breakfast we stayed in had different plumbing, different handles and knobs to lift, press and turn. We find it hard to work out how to control temperature and water flow at the best of times, let alone early in the morning. Some of these showers had to be turned on by pulling a cord by the door. Maybe the Scots enjoy hearing the screams as a stream of cold water hits another victim?

I'm not going to say *anything* about the weather in Scotland.

BAYREUTH, GERMANY—Probably the most cultured we'll ever get. Evelyn's parents gave us tickets for Wagner's opera "Parsifal" in this citadel of German culture. Did you know that Wagner invented the theme tune, much beloved by today's advertisers and TV producers? Evelyn and I didn't, until we went to a talk about the opera the day before the performance itself. Wagner called theme tunes *Leitmotivs*, and he used them to introduce his characters: like Amfortas (the king, who is so ill that he can't even get out of his bed to have a bath, so has to sing lying down). If that doesn't deserve a theme tune, I don't know what does.

The seats in the Bayreuth opera house itself are famed to be hard, and turned out to be harder. We were forewarned: we brought an inflatable cushion each, and sat in blissful comfort while those around us suffered. The music was beautiful.

September

BERGISCH GLADBACH, GERMANY—Evelyn was fed up with trying to sort out piles of receipts, invoices, plane tickets, phone bills, tax claims, and assorted whatnot. And she needed a break from the thrilling world of camel pox, pig castration and other things ethnoveterinary. So she enrolled in a course on accounting. She's learned about double-entry bookkeeping, account balancing, value-added tax, cash flows, depreciation, and other such esoterisms. She says she enjoyed it. I have my doubts as to her sanity.

October

PARIS, FRANCE—Evelyn and Oliver went to Paris to use up some expiring Air France frequent-flier miles. Oliver loved the Louvre. He loved Disneyland (shouldn't it be called "Disneyterre"?) even more. Evelyn lost their Metro tickets. But she'd been taking French lessons, so was confident she could talk her way past the ticket inspector. The hapless inspector was so confused by her Franco-German *mélange* that he let them through.

The next victim was a restaurant waiter. Expecting McDonald's-size portions, Oliver ordered a hotdog and French fries, and Evelyn ordered chicken and fries. But this was France, where they take their food seriously. The hotdog turned out to be a 50-cm-long baguette, filled end-to-end with sausages and cheese; the chicken was similarly immense: enough for two families. Thereafter they ate at a real McDonald's.

November

JAKARTA, INDONESIA—Evelyn, at home in Germany, watched with concern as the television news showed riots on the streets and soldiers attacking student demonstrators. In Jakarta, I sat on the balcony of my guesthouse and counted the helicopters buzzing overhead. An interesting time to be in Indonesia: I was due to leave a few days later, and was afraid I wouldn't be able to make it to the airport. Things quietened down in time, though, and I made it out as scheduled.

BERGISCH GLADBACH, GERMANY—Oliver has been rehearsing for the school musical, "The Birds" by Aristophanes. (Yes, the Greek classical playwright did more than write tragedies). Oliver was a member of the choir, and had to sing while a unicycle-riding goddess and Prometheus (dressed up as Superman, complete with a large, red π on his chest) debated with an Athenian pretending to be a bird. (And you thought that Wagner wrote bizarre scripts...) During a rehearsal, part of the set collapsed as Oliver walked past ("I didn't touch it", he said). The set had been rebuilt by the time of the first performance.

December

BERGISCH GLADBACH, GERMANY—A visit by Sheila and Geoffrey (my parents) and their old friends, Diana and Ted. The talk turned to hobbies. Oliver showed off his 150 Smurfs and his cat collection. I showed off my collection of airsickness bags. Diana had heard I collected such things, but hadn't believed it. "It's true!" she cried. Twice.

I explained the advantages of collecting airsickness bags (that's "barfbags" for our American friends): they're colourful, bring back fond memories of airline cuisine, and are easily stored. I showed my website, with its display of scanned bags from all over the globe. Geoffrey gave me some new bags from their trip to the USA: American Airlines and Air Grand Canyon. Evelyn has doubts about *my* sanity. Diana just thinks I'm weird.

Evelyn and all her relatives think I should take the airsickness bags off the website. "Not professional", they say. So if you have Internet access, go and visit it soon, just in case they put on enough pressure to make me delete them. The address is <http://www.netcologne.de/~nc-mundy>. Send me a bag for my collection (unused, please). Oh, and make sure you've got our new email addresses, too: paulmundy@netcologne.de and evelynmathias@netcologne.de.

Have a wonderful Christmas, Hanukkah, Idul Fitri and New Year.

Paul, Evelyn and Oliver