

Chapter 49
1958 – 1961
Bannockburn / Summer Vacation – 1959

We eventually found out that the youth hostel in Brussels was comfortable and well-equipped; I say ‘eventually’, because it was soon made clear to us that it was standard practice on the continent to delay un-booked registrations by adult students until 5 p.m., at which point the warden might be satisfied that the priority needs of hostellers under the age of sixteen had been met. Although this caused some annoying waits later in our trip, we had previously accepted during our planning meetings that an unexpected night under the stars, or in some hay-loft, would probably add an interesting flavour of ‘je ne sais quoi’ to our travels.

The evening and early morning in Brussels was spent walking around the city to view its architecture and get a feel of its busy social and commercial life. In contrast to the aged and somewhat grimy buildings of our Scottish cities relatively untouched by the bombings of WWII, the feeling of modernity was pervasive. Perhaps most surprising to us was the extent to which social life seemed to be carried on out-of-doors. Street markets, pavement restaurants, cafes and pubs there were in abundance and all these seemed a far cry from our own solely indoor experiences of such provisions back home.



Jim and David Watson and John



The plans for our next moves had set as objectives, the university city of Leuven first, and then onward over the border into Germany to Aachen Youth Hostel for the night.



Thus, later that fourth morning of our expedition, we set off on our merry way again, and, by hitching lifts without much bother, soon reached nearby Leuven. With its students, like us, on vacation, it was very quiet and provincial-looking. No great architectural splendour to compare with our own study environment on Gilmourhill, Glasgow was evident, so we delayed there in 'empty academia' only as long as it took to picnic in a peaceful square and take a 'comfort stop' nearby!



Changing pairings again, with first Ghent and then Aachen as targets for the afternoon's 'thumbing', we parted company on the outskirts of the town and allowed the usual gap of two or three hundred yards to develop between us. It continued to be our lucky day for lifts, as, without much delay, we all reached the sylvan settings of suburban Aachen by late afternoon, were admitted with an immediate and pleasant welcome to the hostel there – more like a hotel than a back-packer's shelter! – thereafter taking in a few sights of the historic town – our first in Germany - before retiring to unaccustomed soft beds for the night.

