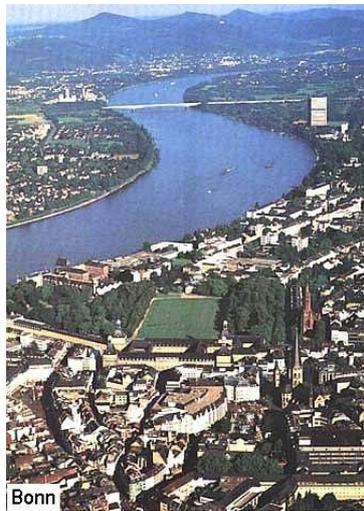


Chapter 50
1958 – 1961
Bannockburn / Summer Vacation – 1959

Our fifth day on the road was again blessed with fine warm weather. Bonn was to be our first stop in order to catch a train to Dusseldorf where we were expected to spend the night and next day with Colonel and Mrs Murphy within the BFE Barracks on the outskirts of the city.



Lifts to Bonn were managed without much delay and we met up again in the Railway Station forecourt there, ready to enjoy our first taste of what we had heard was a very efficient transport system. In the event this boast proved to be true, and, after a most interesting scenic, as well as industrialised journey, we rolled into Dusseldorf on schedule in the early evening.



A phone call to the Murphy household brought us advice as to which tramcar we should catch from the city centre, and, relying on David's memory of further instructions, we, as usual, kilted and cluttered with rucksacks, and subject to curious glances from fellow-passengers, successfully alighted some twenty minutes later within a stone's throw of the British Army base. Mrs Murphy and her husband welcomed us there like 'lost sons' and saw to all our needs wonderfully. Thus, after a great meal, the Colonel got his big car out and took us all for a twilight tour of the nearby industrialised Ruhr, during which it was fascinating to witness the amazing recovery from what must have been the utter devastation that this area had suffered in the early 1940s as a result of the heavy WWII bombing.

Indeed this proved to be a foretaste of the continuing wonder that we experienced during the rest of our travels when viewing the miracles of restitution achieved by the West German people over a mere fourteen years. In this context too we had fully expected to find difficulties in obtaining 'lifts' from a perhaps less than forgiving population. But, as our travels went on, this was seldom the case, because, more elderly folks, it has to be said, than the younger generation, seemed delighted to halt their vehicles at the sight of kilted Scotsmen, welcome their interest in the homeland of their former enemies, and help them on their merry way.

Our second day in Dusseldorf was spent doing city-centre morning shopping in the already huge super-market type stores there, before later, not only gratefully resting and chatting in the Murphy's sun-drenched garden, but also talking over our possible next moves for the morrow. Up the Rhine to Cologne was the consensus arrived at. This objective we expected to reach with ease within the day as it was auto-bahn all the way!

But as it happened it was not all 'plain-sailing'. Not least for Jim and me being the rear pair, as we all soon found out the problems involved in trying to persuade hurrying auto-bahners to stop for hitch-hikers on the approach roads to, or, even less likely, actually on, the motorway safety lanes. However, in ignorance of this frustrating eventuality, we had started off as we usually did, pairs suitably spaced, on the 'slip-road' south. After about half-an-hour or so of ineffectual 'thumbing', Jim and I were suitably heartened to see in the distance that David and Alistair had met with some kind of success and were on their way.

As the minutes slowly dragged on to over an hour of hopes being lifted and then dashed, our spirits flagged just a little. Thus eventually we gave up on the auto-bahn, trudged back to its entrance, and set-off down a secondary road instead. Neither of us really complained as the weather was fine. And of course we had together experienced this kind of failure before on the Island of Skye the previous summer where even the drenching rain then had failed to dampen our spirits. However it was galling to think that the other two would probably already be enjoying a beer in Cologne! Thus, after about two hours of solid walking, and partly out of jealousy, but mainly because of a need to rest our burning feet, and to satisfy growing hunger, we stopped in a village, bought a couple of bottles of lager, a 'sausage' of cold meat and some bread. The following photograph somewhat illustrates our feelings as we sat on the bench across the road from the grocer's!



It was late-afternoon before we had any good fortune, and I cannot for the life of me remember what, or who, it was who had taken pity on us beyond that village! But I do remember vividly, that, after we had eventually wandered wearily in the direction of the Youth Hostel along Cologne's Rhine embankment, *[pictured here]* there were Alistair and David, unabashedly sitting chatting over a drink with other hikers in the hostel garden. "Where have you two been then?" said Alistair with a twinkle in his eye. "We've been waiting here for over four hours for you to arrive!"

