

WENDS of the SPREEWALD



Wend Children on Way to School by Boat.

(Prepared by the National Geographic Society, Washington, D. C.)

LONG ago, when the Goths laid waste to western Europe, a small band of half-wild fugitives hid for safety in the great swamps near the Oder—that low, flat, wooded region known now as the Spreewald. The Wends, this odd fragment of a lost tribe call themselves; and to this day they are hiding there. In this Spreewald swamp, Clannish, isolated, and happiest when left alone, they are concerned not at all with the rise and fall of nations around them.

Though in Germany, the Wends are not of it. Even the Germans themselves look on this lost tribe more as curious specimens of an ancient race than as a part of their citizen body. They are Slavs.

Probably 1,500 years have passed since the Wends first colonized in this great swamp, and sailed forth, led by their pagan kings, to kidnap children and to plunder food in what is now Poland and Germany. Today only a few thousand of the tribe remain; but through all these centuries they have clung tenaciously to their own odd speech, their social forms and superstitions; and, except for a few of their queerly clad girls, who sometimes go to Berlin as nursemaids, the Wends seldom quit their Spreewald haunts.

Yet, content as he is with his eel traps and cucumber patch, his hay field and cherry trees, the wary Wend will drive a sharp bargain with outsiders who come trading for his carved novelties, his wooden shoes and dishes, his smoked eels, and the cucumbers of his island gardens.

Stranger than his diet of eels and cucumbers, however, and stranger even than his hermitlike seclusion, is the unique plan of the Spreewalders' village and his method of getting about. The Spree river, rising down near the old Bohemian frontier, flows up through Saxony into Brandenburg and splits here into hundreds of brooks and canals whose watery network lies all over the Spreewald region and forms thousands of tiny islands. The ancient village of Lehde, built 1,400 years ago, literally covers a whole group of these islands, each individual house standing on a tiny isle all its own.

Their Streets Are Streams.

So, instead of having streets and sidewalks like any normal town, a Spreewald village is served entirely by these crooked water streets. Every family has at least one boat, and in summer the boat is the street car, so to speak; and there are lines of public boats, poled by stalwart "motormen," that run on schedule time over regular routes and loops called "Grobla."

All along these water streets there are signboards that greet you and point the way to various settlements. But instead of saying "two miles," for example, to such or such a place, the sign says "two hours," as all distance is measured by the time it takes to pole to a place.

Some phases of this novel amphibious life seem almost absurd to a visiting American. The American boy, whether he is fourteen or forty, gets a thrill from a brass band and a street parade—and so does the youth of the Spreewald. But we have distinctly American ideas about the correct uniform a brass band should wear, and we insist that a street parade shall march in the street. But the Spreewald form of celebration is wholly different. Here the members of the band dress in long black, funeral-looking coats and two-quart bowler hats; and, instead of marching, they squat in a flat boat, the bass drummer in the stern pounding away as the boat is poled along the canal!

The country here is too low and wet for grain, but wild hay is cut in abundance. A platform of piles is raised high above the swampy ground and on this the haystack is built. Boatloads of hay, moving through the many canals, look from a distance as if they were sliding curiously about the country driven by some unseen force.

In winter the whole waterway net of the Spreewald is frozen over and becomes a veritable spider web of icy lanes and avenues. Then the Wend wears special ice-shoes, with his skates built fast to them. Aided by a light ten-foot pole with a sharp spike in one end, the Spreewalders glide easily about his ice-bound colony, not for pleasure, but for speed and convenience. Then, too, all burdens that

are carried by boat in summer are loaded on sleds.

Eels and Cucumbers.

Eels, cucumbers and cherry pies as big as prayer-rugs figure in all feasts in these Spreewald Swamps.

The Spreewald eel, slim and slippery, smoked or stewed, is enshrined in the songs and traditions of this singular community. A Spreewald swamp home without its eel traps would be like a chicken farm without chicken coops. Whether you like stewed eel or not, you can't sit down in a tiny Spreewald restaurant without buying one; it simply isn't done! And the eels, gastronomically, are mated for life with the cucumbers!

These giant cucumbers, deadly green in shade and wickedly curved like scimitars, threaten you at every turn. Cucumbers in heaps on the river banks; punts piled high with cucumbers being poled to market at Burg or Cottbus; men, women and children plucking, peeling, packing or eating cucumbers, or asleep on piles of them, are always in the summer picture. You wonder the whole world could consume such uncounted tons and not succumb to international indigestion.

Even the huge cherry pies, delicious as they are, fairly overwhelm you by their stupendous size. Throughout the region big, broad-mouthed clay ovens, built apart from the houses, are busy baking these pies, and as you glide along the canals on a still day the forest air is laden with their appetizing odor.

Buxom Wendish maidens, swamp angels in knee skirts and bare legs, push and pull the pies about in the ovens with ten-foot poles, pausing now and then to crack some old bucolic joke with a near-by Spreewald swain busy slicing cucumbers or skinning an eel.

Tourists by thousands from near-by cities flock to this quaint nook of Europe in summer; and then the Wend cashes in his cucumbers, his eels and cherry pies, reaps a rich harvest from his oddly carved wooden geese and dolls, and takes toll for poling lovers and sightseers up and down the labyrinth of water lands dividing the Spreewald into a thousand charming green isles. Here, too, all kinds of so-called and buns come for their outings, many walking clubs of school boys and girls coming from as far away as Berlin and Leipzig.

Superstition Still Rife.

Slaves still to some ancient superstitions, the Wends carve crude wooden figures of beasts, birds and fishes and mount them on the gables of their humble huts. These images, they say, keep off evil spirits and disease and bring good luck.

Some of these old Wendish superstitions, dating back maybe 1,500 years, find their counterparts today in many rural American communities. For example, the Wends say that a crowing hen must be killed or she will bring bad luck. Another Wendish belief common among other races is that when a man dies a window should be opened, so that his soul may take its flight.

If it thunders during a Spreewald wedding every one is very unhappy, for this is a bad omen.

Make a wish when you see a shooting star and the wish will come true. During certain dances held in the spring the farmers jump into the air, believing that the higher they jump on this occasion the higher their flax will grow.

Stewed mice will cure an alcoholic appetite, and a plague of rats is a sure sign of divine displeasure.

The dried heart of a bat killed on Christmas Eve, if carried in the pocket, will bring luck at cards.

The rattle of storks' bills comes to your ears as you approach a Spreewald village—an odd sound, like that made by a boy scraping a stick over a picket fence. When these long-legged birds nest on the roofs of houses they are supposed to bring good luck. Lightning will never strike a house while a stork is roosting on it, the Wends declare. Likewise, if a young stork falls from the nest, it is a bad omen.

Should an old stork quit her nest, the people living in the house below should also move out at once or take the consequences. The Wends say that at Creation the birds of the world chose the stork as king, and that it thinks and could converse with men if only its tongue were longer

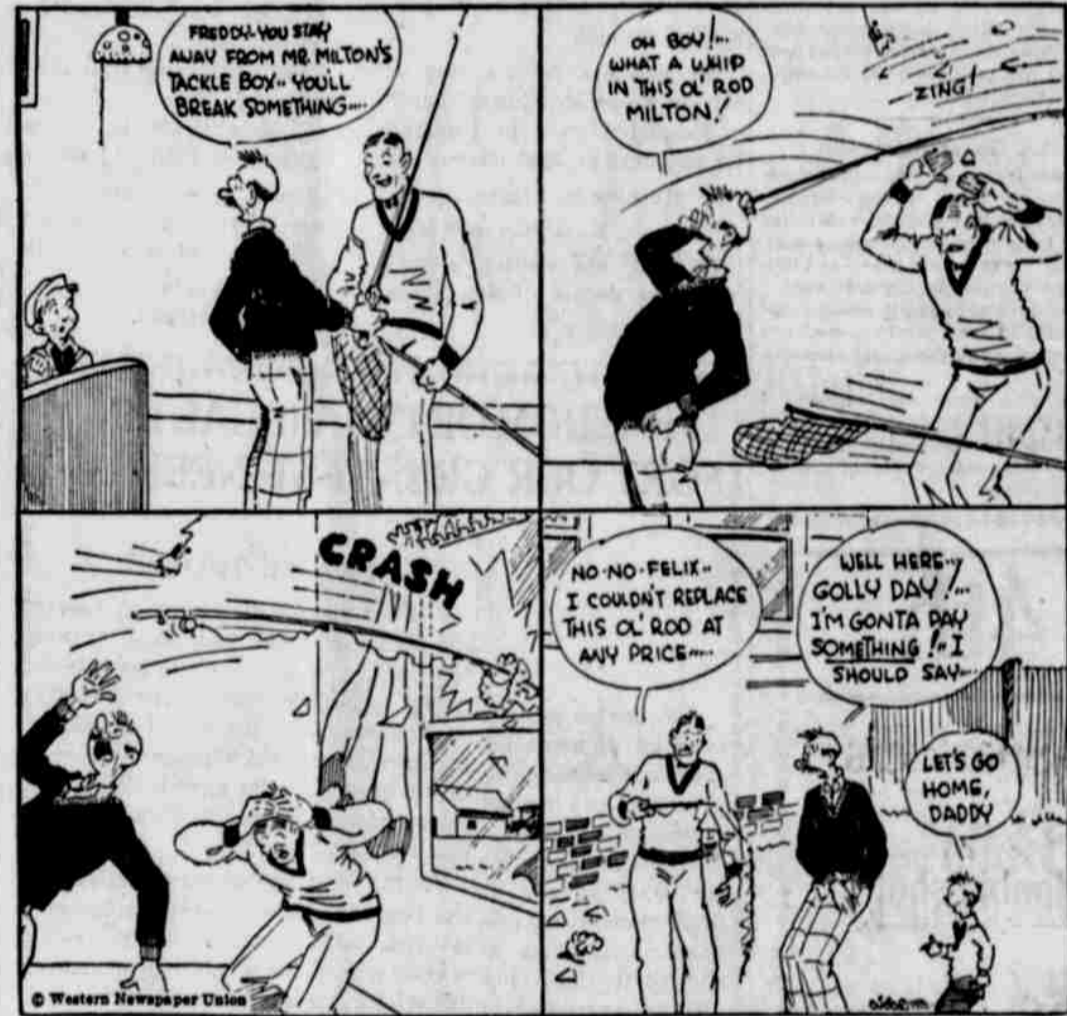
OUR COMIC SECTION

Our Pet Peeve



THE FEATHERHEADS

Watch Out, Freddy



FINNEY OF THE FORCE

Place to Pick Up Bargains



Wall Paper in America

Wall paper was imported by the early settlers of the Colonies. The first factory for making wall paper was established in this country in 1790 by John B. Howell at Albany, N. Y., but the second one did not appear until 1810. During this period the wealthy people were in the habit of importing their wall paper from England and France.

Soil Nourishment

Phosgene is used in dye making, in the form of farm manure, nitrogenous fertilizers and green manure crops, like clover and soy beans. Phosphorus may be added by applying phosphate fertilizers or farm manure. Potassium may be added to a soil in the form of farm manure, crop residues and potash fertilizers.

India's Plague of Beggars

It has recently been stated that at the latest twelfth-year fair at Madras, the road from the city to the bathing place—a distance of two and a half miles—was lined with religious beggars, sitting shoulder to shoulder. Each had an attendant sitting in front soliciting alms for his master.

William Penn's Colony

On April 25, 1682, William Penn proposed to his colonists that they make their own laws. His promise to the colonists was: "You shall be governed by laws of your own making and live a free, sober and industrious people."

Education in France

Primary education is compulsory for all French children from six to thirteen; those who do not attend the government schools are obliged to prove that they receive proper tuition either in private school or at home.

Link With the Past

A shark's tooth was unearthed in a garden at Hillingdon, between Uxbridge and Ickenham, Middlesex, England. When sent to the British museum it was identified as belonging to the Middle Eocene period.

Baseball Uniforms

The first baseball team that wore uniforms was the Knickerbockers of New York in 1845. The first to wear the present-day uniform with short pants was the Cincinnati Reds in 1868.

Duralumin

The chemical properties of duralumin are as follows: Copper 3.5 to 4.5 per cent; manganese, 4 to 1 per cent; magnesium, 2 to .75 per cent; aluminum, 92 per cent, minimum.

Why Seek Great Riches?

"Great riches," said Hi Ho, the sage of Chinatown, "bring great responsibilities. A few yen will buy luxury. Millions of them purchase care."—Washington Star.

Crime World's Loss

Had Houdini placed his marvelous abilities to evil uses he would have been the gravest menace ever known to organized society.—American Magazine.

The Only Exception

Note to parents: The world's first boy went to the bad—and it wasn't the fault of the neighbor's brats.—San Francisco Chronicle.

Don't "Bark" Over Phone

Don't "bark" over the telephone. Lots of business is lost by people who do not talk calmly over the telephone.—Arlington Globe.

Agricultural Definition

"Co-ordination in agriculture" means that after you dig for worms you discover you have spaded the garden.—Detroit News.

A Magnet Then

It is easy for a man to locate relatives, near and distant, after he has become a hero.—Des Moines Tribune-Capital.

Tip to Snobs

Equality may not always be possible, but brotherhood always is.—American Magazine.

Calloused Hands

Calloused hands can be caused from play as well as work.—Arlington Globe.

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