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FREDERICK SIMPICH

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TO carry out the purposes for which it was founded thirty-four years ago, the National Geographic Society publishes this Magazine. All receipts are invested in the Magazine itself or expended directly to promote geographic knowledge.

ARTICLES and photographs are desired. For material which the Magazine can use, generous remuneration is made. Contributions should be accompanied by an addressed return envelope and postage.

IMMEDIATELY after the terrific eruption of the world's largest crater, Mt. Katmai, in Alaska, a National Geographic Society expedition was sent to make observations of this remarkable phenomenon. Four expeditions have followed and the extraordinary scientific data resultant given to the world. In this vicinity an eighth wonder of the world was discovered and explored—"The Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes," a vast area of steaming, spouting fissures. As a result of The Society's discoveries this area has been created a National Monument by proclamation of the President of the United States.

AT an expense of over \$50,000 The Society sent a notable series of expeditions into Peru to investigate the traces of the Inca race. Their

discoveries form a large share of our knowledge of a civilization which was waning when Pizarro first set foot in Peru.

THE Society also had the honor of subscribing a substantial sum to the historic expedition of Admiral Peary, who discovered the North Pole.

NOT long ago The Society granted \$25,000, and in addition \$75,000 was given by individual members through The Society to the Federal Government when the congressional appropriation for the purchase was insufficient, and the finest of the giant sequoia trees of California were thereby saved for the American people and incorporated into a National Park.

THE Society is conducting extensive explorations and excavations in northwestern New Mexico, which was one of the most densely populated areas in North America before Columbus came, a region where prehistoric peoples lived in vast communal dwellings whose ruins are ranked second to none of ancient times in point of architecture, and whose customs, ceremonies and name have been engulfed in an oblivion more complete than any other people who left traces comparable to theirs.



Photograph from Techno-Photographisches Archiv

PEASANT TYPES OF THE SPREEWALD: GERMANY

In most difficult circumstances, the Wends, or Sorbs, have resolutely retained their language and their Slavic customs in the midst of a German population.

THE WENDS OF THE SPREEWALD

BY FREDERICK SIMPICH

AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF THE RUHR," "ALONG THE NILE, THROUGH EGYPT AND THE SUKUT," "THE GEOGRAPHY OF OUR FOREIGN TRADE," "EVERY-DAY LIFE IN AFGHANISTAN," ETC., IN THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC MAGAZINE

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 sallied forth, led by their pagan kings, to kidnap children and to plunder food in what is now Poland and Germany. To-day 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 hayfield 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.

ANCIENT SPREEWALD VILLAGE IS BUILT ON MANY ISLETS

Stranger than his diet of eels and cucumbers, however, and stranger even than his hermit-like seclusion, is the unique plan of the Spreewalder's 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 this Spreewald re-

gion 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.

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 "mottormen," that run on schedule time over regular routes and loops called "Grobla."

DISTANCE IS MEASURED BY BOAT TIME

All along these water streets there are sign-boards that greet you and point the way to various settlements. But instead of saying "2 miles," for example, to such or such a place, the sign says "2 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 14 or 40, 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, funereal-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!

After a wedding ceremony the bridal pair, instead of dashing away in a motor, climb into a boat and sit down beneath a canopy of evergreen twigs and flowers. Their honeymoon trip is a few hours of riding around the canals of the Spreewald followed by a boatload of musicians and friends, and by troops of children who run along the canal banks and throw flowers at them. In warm summer days



THE SPREEWALD SALUTATION: "HAVE A CUCUMBER?"



Photographs from Frederick Simpich

MUSIC IN THE SPREEWALD

This is not the American idea of how a brass band should act, but the Wends of the Spree-wald like it this way (see text, page 327). The sausage-like cargo in the boat at the right is cucumbers.

they may have to run the gantlet of groups of bathers, who count it good sport to "splash" the bridegroom's new suit, as his boat passes.

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 Spreewalder glides 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.

THE COW IS CARRIED TO PASTURE

The Wend farm boys take the family cow to and from her island pasture, in summer, in a flat-bottom boat; but in winter if a cow or pig is to be moved it is put in a crate built fast to a sled.

Old women skate to church in winter, and graceful skating girls carry lunches of smoked eels and cucumber pickles to the men who chop wood along the tree-bordered canals.



Photograph from Frederick Simpich

A SPREEWALD EEL.

An eel, a cucumber, and a piece of cherry pie is the Wendish epicure's dream of a perfect feast (see text, page 332). After 17 years of study and research, it has been discovered within recent months that the fresh-water eels of Europe breed in West Indian waters, some 4,000 miles distant. More than three years elapse between the time of their birth and their appearance in the waters of the Spree.

Children skate to school; the doctor and the mail-carrier go and come on skates, and the policeman (says the oldest current Spreewald joke) sleeps with his skates on.

But at certain periods in the spring and fall life here is dull and lonely. When the ice first forms, the Wend cannot push his boat through it, nor will this first thin crust support his sled. So, too, when the spring thaw sets in, he can only sit and smoke and wait, or busy himself with carving wooden dolls, geese, miniature



Photograph by A. Frankl

THE GERMAN VENICE IN SUMMER-TIME: SPREEWALD GIRLS GOING TO CHURCH

About one and a half hours' ride from Berlin, in the direction of Breslau, the train stops at Luchben, which is the starting place for an excursion to the Spreewald, a lowland crossed by the Spree River, with many side rivers and canals. The people of the Spreewald have preserved their old habits and customs, which are to be found nowhere else in Germany. The women wear a characteristic dress of bright-colored skirts and unique caps.



Photograph by A. Frankl

THE SPREEWALD LETTER-CARRIER MAKES HIS ROUNDS ON SKATES
IN WINTER



Photograph from Techno-Photographisches Archiv

THE SPREEWALD BAGPIPE SEEMS TO BE A DOUBLE RELATIVE OF
THE SAXOPHONE



Photograph from Frederick Simpich

IN SUMMER THE CHILDREN OF THE WENDS HAVE ONLY TO TUMBLE OUT OF BED AND ROLL INTO THE CANAL FOR THEIR MORNING BATH

When bridal parties pass in boats, it is a favorite sport of these youngsters to "splash" the helpless bridegroom.

boats, and other novelties to sell to summer tourists.

EELS, CUCUMBERS, AND CHERRY PIES

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 re-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



Photograph from Frederick Simpich

ON THEIR WAY TO SCHOOL.

In place of a street car or a bus, the children of the Spreewald use this method of transportation when the waters are open. In winter they skate, the older ones often pulling the tiny tots on sleds.

the labyrinth of water lanes dividing the Spreewald into a thousand charming green isles. Here, too, all kinds of societies and *bunds* come for their outings, many walking clubs of school boys and girls coming from as far away as Berlin and Leipzig.

Once, rounding a canal bend in a deep forest, I came suddenly on a group of 30 red-bearded men, mostly bald, standing bareheaded and motionless under a great tree, all staring fixedly at a begoggled little fellow mounted on a stump.

Swarms of mosquitoes kept me slapping, and I knew others just as hungry must be working on the thirty bald-headed men standing there on that weedy knoll in the swamp. Yet not a man moved; they only fixed their gaze on the little man and waited.

Finally this leader threw up his arms, the 30 opened their mouths, and as the leader's baton cut the air they burst into the Pilgrims' Chorus! It was a Saengerbund from some neighboring town, seeking pleasure in this typically serious way. How truly that Roman spoke who

said that races of men differ in habits, etc. Fancy 30 middle-aged American business men from, say, Baltimore, growing full beards and hiding out for a week-end in a Maryland swamp and singing all day!

Drawn one night by faint shouts and the light of a distant fire, I quit the village of Burg and crossed the flat fields to investigate. Reaching a high knoll, where the crowd had gathered, I found an ancient ceremony, the ordeal of fire, being observed. Pairs of young men and women, grasping hands, were running and leaping over the burning wood.

The feat was easy and safe enough unless some one stumbled. It was merely symbolical, I imagine, of some event or tradition in their history; but it seemed a solemn rite with them, the whole group shouting a set phrase in their strange tongue, as each couple leaped through the blaze.

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.



Photograph from Techno-Photographisches Archiv

IN THE FLAX FIELDS

In springtime the delicate blue flowers of the flax patches of the Spreewald present a lovely picture. The blossoms fall after only a few hours, giving rise to the old Wend proverb, that human life is like the bloom of the flax—it quickly passes.

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 to-day in many rural American communities. For example, the Wends say that a crowing hen must be killed or she will bring bad luck. When I was a boy in Missouri I knew people there who also firmly believed this. 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 up 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.

THE LEGEND OF THE DWARFS

Traditions say that long ago these swamps were peopled by pigmies—men and women about the size of two-year-old children—a people who worshiped idols and who burned their dead amid singing and dancing. The more superstitious Wends declare that even now these dwarfs may often be seen in the swamps.

One legend says that an inland sea once covered much of this region, and that long ago you might still find ruins of towers and houses in the bed of the Spree. This tradition of a sunken city is very current, the story re-appearing in various forms.

Once a fatal pest swept the region. In a vision the Wends were told to extinguish all fire, every spark of it, and the plague would vanish. They did so, and the pest promptly disappeared. They got fire again by rubbing dry wood together.

When children are born the stars are carefully studied, and every man's destiny is determined by the position of the planets at the time of his birth.

The Wends, before being Christianized, worshiped various objects in nature, like trees and stones. To-day the Sunday church-going parade of the women, in



Photograph from Frederick Simpuch

WENDISH MAIDS AT THE SPINNING-WHEEL

their short hoopskirts and queer airplane-like headdresses, is easily the most striking in all the odd life of this curious colony (see illustration, page 330).

The church I entered was packed to standing room. But the sermon, emphatic and absorbing though it seemed to the native audience, meant nothing to me, for the stalwart preacher spoke in the Wendish tongue. Even the Germans do not understand this ancient language.

A CONTENTED LOT

Among all the "little peoples" of middle Europe, the Wends are perhaps the most satisfied. The Treaty of Versailles tampered not at all with the borders of their swampy domain; nor did it seek to set them up as a new nation. They are



Photograph from Frederick Simpich

THE WEAVING INDUSTRY AT COTTBUS, IN THE SPREEWALD

The Wendish women will undertake outside work of this sort, but the men can rarely be induced to quit their tiny farms and their wood-cutting and carving in winter. Even while at work, these women cling to the queer headdress that has made them one of the curiosities of central Europe.

not a political thorn in the side of any neighbors; nor are they "red," or restless, or politically ambitious. They do not wish to invade, or to migrate, or to call any plebiscites. All they want is to be left alone—to trap eels and bake cherry pies.

Many generations in the future, perhaps, they may, by a slow process, mix with and be lost among the people about them. To-day, however, as for a thou-

sand years past, they lurk somewhat timidly in this great swamp of central Europe, an odd, lost fragment of a tribe that was a peaceful, charming people.

As we paddled around a bend in the main canal, leaving the romantic Spreewald, we passed a stalwart, wiry Wend, leaning gracefully to his long pole like a gondolier of Venice, as he pushed a boat-load of cucumbers.

ANOTHER IMPORTANT MAP

AS A SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT with the April number of *THE GEOGRAPHIC*, the National Geographic Society will issue a New Map of the United States in five colors (28 x 38 inches). Although of such convenient size as to be adapted to use as a wall map in the office or the home, practically every town of 2,000 inhabitants is shown, while in the less densely populated sections communities of 1,000 and less are indicated. All transcontinental and through north-to-south passenger railway lines are shown, as well as many other important railroads, while 35 automobile routes and national park-to-park highways are shown and named.

In addition to the main map, there are 16 inset maps of the principal cities of the country and their metropolitan districts. The Society believes that this will prove a distinct addition to the seven special map supplements recently issued with *THE GEOGRAPHIC* at a cost of \$250,000.



Once or twice a week for nearly fourteen years, Mrs. Maertz has beaten, swept and suction-cleaned her rugs with The Hoover. She has twenty-four rugs; the newest are twelve years old, while the oldest are eighteen. And she keeps roomers.

Even her 18-year-old rugs are still in good condition

"My rugs are frequently admired for their bright and clean appearance, yet I never have to pay to send them out for cleaning—I use *The Hoover*. People can scarcely believe it when I tell them the age of my rugs, for nothing is harder on your rugs than roomers."

And Mrs. Wm. F. Maertz, whose house at 880 First St., Milwaukee, is pictured above, adds: "I have been told by people who knew nothing about *The Hoover* that it was injurious to rugs. My own experience causes me to believe that rugs not Hoover-cleaned wear out twice as fast. I know that *The Hoover* has paid for itself over and over by making my rugs last many years longer—and it makes sweeping a pleasure."

Surely she is qualified to speak with authority!

"Some of my friends," continues Mrs. Maertz, "liked my Hoover so well that they sold their cleaners and bought Hoovers. Others are sorry they didn't know about *The Hoover* before buying. Many people are satisfied with their cleaners until they see *The Hoover* work. "Personally I have tried other cleaners and am convinced I would have no other."

*Write us for names of Authorized Dealers who will gladly demonstrate *The Hoover* on your rugs—no obligation. On the divided payment plan, 17c to 25c a day soon pays for a Hoover*

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The HOOVER

It BEATS... as it Sweeps as it Cleans

What bird flies 120 miles an hour?

What plant lives on insects?
How many eggs does a humming bird lay?
How long does it take for a butterfly to develop?
What tree is the woodman's defense against death by cold and starvation?
Where does the whippoorwill build its nest?
What is the first wild flower to bloom?
What is the difference between a butterfly and a moth?
Do trees really breathe?
What bird is the first to go south?
What bird eats one and one-half times its own weight every 12 hours?
What plant kills animals if they eat it?
What bird hangs a snake's skin on its nest to ward off enemies?

THOMAS A. EDISON LUTHER BURBANK HENRY FORD



JOHN BURROUGHS

You, too, will find your happiest hours among friends of forest and field

NATURE abounds with magic. For those who know its language, a wonderful story is told by the simplest roadside flower. The fields and forests are filled with a host of friends—the birds, the butterflies, the flowers, the trees—each with its own individuality, its personal charm.

To know Nature is to love it—you find an endless fascination in its wondrous workings; you become absorbed in its extraordinary mysteries; you constantly discover new and curious phenomena; you see new meanings in each changing season. Every stroll through the out-of-doors is filled with never-ending interest; the countryside becomes a veritable Fairyland, teeming with enchantment, peopled with the most interesting folk you ever knew.

You, too, will find your happiest hours among your friends of forest and field, just as have such famous

men as Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas A. Edison, John Burroughs, Henry Ford, and Luther Burbank. These men, with the means to command any form of recreation, found nothing so enjoyable as their understanding and appreciation of Nature.

This rare pleasure awaits you now in the delightful pages of *The Little Nature Library*—the beautiful four-volume set that brings to you the whole wonder world of Nature's secrets.

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