

Trip report E.W.Dijkstra, Europe, 13.12.1985 - 10.1.1986

To start with a few advices to the airline passenger.

0. If your ticket is a few months old, check well in advance that the schedule has not been changed. When we arrived at Austin Airport in the expectation that Eastern Airlines would take us to Atlanta, we learned that Eastern Airlines had pulled out of Austin. Fortunately we were early enough to catch an earlier flight by Delta Airlines, which honoured our tickets. It was an unpleasant surprise to start our journey with.
1. Don't book a KLM flight for Friday the 13th in the hope that the plane will be occupied below average: you will find the plane fully booked with passengers that harboured the same hope.
2. Avoid departing from or arriving at Welschap with small planes like the F27 in those months when the runway could be covered with snow, sleet, or ice; I had three of such flights, only the last of which was actually consumed.
3. If you can enter the USA via Atlanta, do it. We walked from the gate to the belt and by the time we arrived there, the luggage was already coming in. It was fantastic. Immigration and customs were equally smooth. The official 91 minutes we had to change planes had been reduced to 71 by late arrival but we had plenty of time to catch our connection.
4. If you can choose a British Airways flight leaving Schiphol around noon, do it: the food was really excellent.
5. In the same vein I should suggest to avoid leaving the USA by KLM; Marriott's catering for those flights is not up to par.

So much for my advices to the airline passenger.

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After a thorough cleaning of the house, followed by a poisoning of all possible insect entrances, we left on Friday the 13th of December 1985 and arrived the next morning at 9:55 at Schiphol, where our daughter Femke was waiting for us with a car. It was a foggy day.

We used the weekend for recovery as, on Monday, life would start in real earnest. Ria went that day by train to Amsterdam to greet her mother, while I was interviewed most of that day by a Mexican student from the University of Edinburgh who wrote a thesis on the history of software development.

On Tuesday, Ria and I drove, mostly in heavy rain, to Groningen at the other side of the country in order to attend the inaugural lecture by prof.dr.ir. Jan L.A. van de Snepscheut, a lecture we very much enjoyed. That night we stayed with Femke, as she would graduate the next morning at the Department of Slavonic Languages. After the formality, she and a colleague offered their guests a nice breakfast by way of celebration. Around noon we left and drove to Nuenen, again mostly in heavy rain. South of the village Veghel, the cable of the clutch of the

rental car broke. Thanks to the proximity of the garage where we had rented it and the kind assistance of a young lady that saw us getting stuck and offered her assistance, the delay was no longer than an hour. It was, however, raining cats and dogs, and we got accordingly wet.

On Thursday I went to the Eindhoven University of Technology, where I gave a talk at its recently founded Informatics Colloquium. I had a nice crowd and explained Battcher's Baffler, which by now is a very beautiful story. It was well-received.

And on Friday we went up North again, to Zutphen, where we celebrated my mother's 85th anniversary with a lunch in the IJsselrestaurant. That was the first time I met my mother and my sister, and on this trip the only time I met my brother and his wife. It was nice to see them all again; we did not stay too long as pretty foul weather had been predicted for the evening.

And so on, and so on. I worked only twice with Carel S.Scholten and only twice with Netty van Gasteren and attended only one session of the Eindhoven Tuesday Afternoon Club (on 31.12.1985). It was a nice session; we read AvG65/EWD950 "On notation" and collected helpful --and encouraging!-- comments. And besides all that we did the usual things, visited the children and received them, had friends for dinner and were invited for dinner, etc. And occasionally we did nothing at all. We did not make much use of our bicycles, for in the night of 26/27 Dec. it started to snow, instantaneously transforming the whole country into one big Christmas card. So Ria and I put on our rubber boots and made a series of beautiful pictures in the immediate surroundings of Nuenen. It was unbelievable!

The winter will, however, go down into the Books of History as "The Winter in which We Found the Old Mont Blancs". I love my Mont Blanc but for many years am painfully aware of the fact that the company stopped making this model about a decade ago: it is the model with the built-in pump that takes much more ink than its replacement, which accepts cartridges as well. Since it is nice to have a spare, it has become second nature for me to try new models whenever I encounter them. One afternoon I went to the village stationery shop to buy European staples, saw a new Mont Blanc, tried it and did not like it, when the saleslady behind the counter said with great hesitation "When you don't object to using an ink pot, I have another model, but it is very old.....". The dear soul sold me her treasure for the original price. After that find Ria suggested that we should try that shop's other branch in Someren, where Netty van Gasteren and Wim Feijen bought the remaining three copies. They too still had their original price tags and were even cheaper; on top of that they even got fl 10.-- discount per pen! So much for the stationery shops in little Brabantian villages.

The last Monday, Netty and I flew to England to give a workshop for BP. For safety's sake we went to Schiphol by train instead of by air. The (BA) flight to Heathrow was okay, but from there on everything seemed to go wrong. We arrived at Terminal 1, while Don Braben tried to collect us from Terminal 2. After Netty had contacted him by paging, we thought the problem had been solved but then the one confusion piled upon the other and eventually it took almost two hours to sort out that mess.

The workshop was held in the hotel "The Spread Eagle" in Midhurst where it was frequently as cold as the hotel was old. I slept --at least: tried to do so-- in "The Queen's Suite", distinguished by a four-poster and a closet for powdered wigs (or wig powder, I don't remember) dating from 1430 A.D.. But apart

from such minor inconveniences, the workshop was quite successful, the more so since we succeeded in flying back home on Wednesday evening. With Netty's Dick and my Ria and Femke we celebrated the happy reunions with a late Indonesian/Chinese dinner at Kota Radja, opposite to the railway station. On Thursday we packed, in the evening a number of friends came by to say goodbye and on Friday morning Femke drove us with all our luggage to Welschap: this time we could use the small airport. At 19.55 local time we landed in Austin; we took a taxi and shortly thereafter we were home again. Not counting a dozen dead insects on the floor --and no scorpions this time!-- we found the house at Robbie Creek Cove in perfect condition.

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Europe is not happy these days. I found a lot of tension and envy. (The latter is probably the price to be paid for its prevailing egalitarianism.) By way of protest the Dutch truck drivers blocked a number of border posts and traffic junctions; when we arrived at Heathrow, the English taxi drivers were on strike; one participant of the workshop arrived a day late, due to a strike of the French air traffic controllers; and I never saw so many armoured cars and fully armed soldiers guarding the air ports. And at the Universities --at both sides of the North Sea-- people are beginning to feel themselves so much betrayed by their governments that it is often hard not to get bitter. On paper there are still plenty of funds for informatics, but as that money has been earmarked to work miracles it only promotes quackery. Tension and envy, and each proposal being wrapped up in more and more layers of dishonesty. Europe is not happy these days.

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Needless to say, I bought myself a typewriter the other day, a Triumph/Adler/Royal "satellite III". It is electronic and in its more advanced features so user-friendly that the corresponding sections in the (46-page!) manual are utterly baffling. So far, the alphabet works.

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