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Germany
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We have just returned from a couple of months in our house in England to find a lot of snow and to enjoy the run up to Christmas. Here it included the German-American Ball, the Monteverdi Vespers at the Frauenkirche in Munich, the Messiah next week at the Christuskirche, also in Munich, and last night a torchlight tramp in the snow up to a local mountain hut to enjoy an evening and sing carols with a ladies Stammtisch there. So it clearly time to sort out the cards and to send our best wishes and news to you.

Travelling to UK we were able to see all the children and grandchildren. Both going and coming we stayed with Stephen and Conny in Düsseldorf, filling in a gap on the way back between Conny leaving for a concert and Stephen arriving from Korea. We seem to get on well with Sarah and Timothy (now 5 and 2), as we had also found in the summer when they came to see us.

We went to Scotland for a weekend with Michael and Nicky. It was a boisterous time with William (9), James (7) and Charlie (5) together with their dog. We had seen them in the summer when they came for a visit and we were lucky enough to see the real millennium experience, the total eclipse. By chance we made an inspired choice and all went to the zoo. Thus the children had plenty to look at and were not bothered about the changing sun until the totality which occurred in a fifteen minute break in the clouds. Ten minutes later the sun was obscured again with a heavy shower.

Paul and Rosalind and their two daughters, Fiona (12) and Felicity (9) visited us twice in the year, once to ski and also when Michael and family were here: we also saw them with their new dog for a very pleasant day in England when we went on a nostalgia trip round the university where Paul grew up.

Our own year started cheerfully with a trip to Oxford to help Richard Wayne celebrate his 60th, with a brief scientific meeting and a splendid dinner in Christchurch. We also stayed with Paul and family. Then to Rome for my last EUROTRAC meeting when some embarrassingly nice things were said about the contributions that both of us had made. The trip was made still more memorable by having my pocket picked in the Metro! My place has been taken by an enthusiastic English scientist, Pauline Midgley, and it is encouraging for both of us that the project which has dominated our lives for so long is in safe, capable and innovative hands.

All our dreams came true with my retirement at the beginning of February which was greeted with the first heavy fall of snow. We had always wanted to see a really big snowfall and over nearly six weeks, on and off, we had several!! When we were teenagers together we had talked of always being together; now we could hardly get out of the flat, and Patricia realised the truth of the saying, embroidered on a cushion cover: retirement: twice as much husband; half a much money!!

But we have survived, more or less intact, and went on to have a lovely study holiday in Naples and the Amalfi coast; a nice holiday in Ireland when we boated with my sister and bother-in-law on the Erne and the canal to the Shannon; and skiing trips to Hochgurgl and, with Christopher and Gwenda, to Keystone and Vail. The last two were our first

experience of Colorado skiing, unfortunately in a year without much of the famed powder snow (it was probably better in Garmisch)!!

The trip to the US was enhanced by a couple of frantic days in New York when we went to an opera at the Met (we should say the new Met, as our last opera there was at the old Met in 1961, before it was replaced!), a concert and a day in the Metropolitan Museum. There seems to have been a lot of opera with an emotional Ring Cycle in April and many other visits to Munich. However it was topped off in an entirely unexpected way with two operas from the Glyndebourne touring group at the Regent in Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, within 15 minutes of our home in Newcastle. One advantage that a well-converted cinema has over a normal European opera house, is that it was built so that everyone can see, and this was enhanced by the well lit and cheerful Glyndebourne sets, and by the wonderful enthusiasm of the young cast.

And, despite retirement, there's been the work! There were substantial things to finish when I left and Pauline kindly arranged for us to do the work. These came home to roost in the summer, together with a commission from the Swedish environmental agency, and we have been very busy since then writing, editing and also writing new computer software to enable the data base in Munich to function in the New Year. All this should calm down soon and then we shall find out what retirement is really like.

In England we saw not only our old friends but also, in attending concerts, plays and walks, many acquaintances who had nearly slipped from our memory and who seemed as pleased to see us as we were to see them. Our experience in England was a great encouragement when thinking about returning to Newcastle. At the moment we have decided to stay put but to spend some time regularly at Berne Avenue. We shall see how that goes for a bit and then think again.

Sadly not everyone we saw was in good health, which was a salutary reminder of the great good fortune we have in being healthy enough to enjoy our friends and the beginning of our retirement.

We are staying here for Christmas and hope to see in the Millennium with a walk up with some friends in the dark to see the fireworks over the town. It could be interesting coming down if the Millennium bug strikes the electricity supply!!

And finally our very best wishes to you and yours for Christmas and the New Year.