



6 Berne Avenue
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire ST5 2QJ

A merry Christmas and a very happy New Year to you and your family.

So we've moved – and instead of looking out at the snow-capped Kramer against a blue sky, I can now see a large sky filled with racing rain-laden clouds, just turning to a threatening orange as the sun goes down.

The move was accomplished with little trouble except the agony of trying to throw bits of our earlier life away. Things are now in reasonable order here, although there are still a few unpacked boxes in the garage, and there are still quite a number of things to dispose of, including twenty or so boxes of my chemical history. We had arranged to have most of the house decorated during the two years before our return so we have set about the garden. We were hardly back before Carl Hawkins and his lad, Colin, started work. And they are still here! The pond, the patio and the beds are complete and they are now working on the driveway, so we are more or less isolated from the world by the mud. The end however is in sight although it will not actually be finished until January.

Our first visitors were Stephen and family who spent a week here in July. Sarah and Timmy helped Colin dig the pond and paint the fence, and we looked after the two of them (the grandchildren) for a wonderfully fine weekend, during which we sampled the delights of Chester zoo: it seems even better than when our children were small. We have seen quite a lot of our Düsseldorf family this year not only having visited them going to and from Garmisch but also having spent last New Year together skiing in Saas Fee. It was fun, helping to teach Mum and the children the fundamentals of skiing and seeing them improve with practice during the week. The children are growing fast, and seem to be happy at school. Conny now has nearly a full time job translating documents and a book between German and English, and *vice-versa*, as well as looking after the family: Stephen is still travelling regularly to the far east and seems to be finding new niche markets for his highly-reflective anodised aluminium.

We saw Michael and family recently as well when we went to stay with them in Argentina for two weekends (separated by a holiday there). They live in a spacious house with a large garden and a view over the Rio del Platte. However the security situation, which was always problematic, has worsened since the financial crisis a year ago. The gates are firmly locked: one seldom walks anywhere in Buenos Aires (it is fine elsewhere), and several friends and acquaintances have been the victims of car robberies. The family are, happily, largely unperturbed: Nicky's tennis has improved further and she has taken up golf; the children, William, James and Charlie, are vigorously engaged at school and are often at other friends' houses or have friends round to stay. However Mike's job has become more demanding as he negotiates with the federal and provincial governments about oil and tax revenues. It can be disheartening when the policies are determined by people who do not expect to remain in power and by a system where the rules change on almost a daily basis. Despite the excitement of being in what is a wonderful country, I think they will be pleased to go elsewhere when, as seems likely, a move is offered in the coming year.

We didn't see Paul and family for more than a year, but made amends last weekend with a most cheerful visit to Peterborough. We saw Fiona and Felicity running cross country and doing well in grey cold conditions - and then saw them both perform in the school show: they seem to be able to turn their hands to anything, academic, musical or sporting with amazing ability. When not looking after the family, Rosalind devotes her enthusiasm to "Home Start", a scheme for assisting Mums and children in difficulties. Paul changed his job and seems to be keenly engaged in running a business services firm.

Our Argentinean holiday was magical as always; we went to the North West and explored the high plains (14000') and valleys of the Andes, vast remote areas with small villages having remains of the

earliest peoples there, as well as of the Spanish who approached Argentina from that direction. We couldn't resist spending a weekend again at the falls at Iguazu and then travelled on to Colonia del Pellegrini in Corrientes. This was more exciting than expected: it is in the middle of a vast marsh about the size of Northern England. Getting to Pellegrini involved traversing a hundred miles of dirt road, much of which was deep wet sand. But it was worth it. We found ourselves at a Posada on the edge of a large lagoon surrounded by miles of rushes, floating island and wetlands. The trips, made with a boatman, revealed a landscape full of caiman (Argentinean alligators) capebara (the largest rodents), howler monkeys in the few trees, and myriads of colourful and unusual birds. We doubled the number of definite Argentinean bird sightings in just a couple of days.

We also had our usual skiing holiday at Hochgurgl, and a trip to the UK in March, punctuated by a return visit to attend a Symposium for the project I used to run. And I had a fortnight's non-holiday in May when I hoped to sail from Barry to Brittany with Eric Whittle. The weather was too bad to start so I had a cheerful time staying with Eric and Pat, and sculling round on the trains to visit Melanie and travelling to Ireland to stay with my sister. Pat stayed at home preparing for the move!

In March we attended a "space night" in Bremen to have a celebration for the launch of the ESA satellite, Envisat. It was a happy evening but got rather tense about 02.30 when the launch took place (in Guyana). Some people at the dinner had initiated the project and been working on the design and implementation for fifteen years. Since the previous launcher had exploded, everyone was nervous. All however went well: the satellite is now passing over you at about 10.15 daily and results are being delivered from which the air pollutants at ground level can be measured.

We are still trying to keep fit by walking but it is less easy here than in Garmisch; however we have still managed a number of longer walks, and have really enjoyed the Shropshire Hills, Snowdon, the peak district and the Yorkshire coast. It was these sort of walks across a rolling landscape that I yearned for, while abroad.

Since we have been back, we have a number of short trips away: one to sell our German car and buy a UK model in Holland, one to run a workshop in Utrecht, and others to see friends in Suffolk and plays in Yorkshire. There has been a surprising amount of opera too: the festival at Buxton provided some unusual ones in their attractive little opera house; the quality of the Clonter opera, held in a Barn near Congelton which has been converted into a neat little theatre, was astonishing, and it was all topped off by the annual visit of the Glyndbourne touring opera to the Regent in Hanley. There were three wonderful productions, the equal of anything elsewhere. One link we have kept with Garmisch is our season ticket for the Munich opera. We have been back once already, to enjoy the opera trip we make with our American and German friends in Garmisch, and hope to go again in the New Year. We travelled there through France, where we stopped off in Mulhouse and also spent a few days boating on the Marne-Rhine canal, a interesting stretch with some long tunnels and an enormous inclined plane.

The nicest thing about being home is linking up with old friends again. Thanks to the Garden Works we have not yet held a party but we have had a number of people to some cheery lunches together. At last perhaps we are beginning to appreciate that when retired you really can take the afternoon off!! We have also appreciated several invitations to join local groups, again meeting old and new friends in the process.

As you can see, life is still being very kind to us, for which, in this less certain world we are truly thankful.

With very best wishes

Tel: int-44-1782-626484

Fax: int-44-1782-626484 (manual)
Web page: www.luna.co.uk/~pborrell

e-mail: pborrell@luna.co.uk