

Pegasus Anniversary Ride in the Northern Vosges

Amidst cliffs, castles and forests in a paradise for trail riders

50 years of Pegasus – a reason to celebrate! Fittingly, on horseback. For the occasion, we've chosen the trail riding centre run by Alice, a native of Scotland who leads riding tours and day rides in the Vosges as far as Germany, very much in the spirit of trail riding pioneer Herbert Fischer, who defined trail riding as a combination of riding, hiking, enjoyment and a touch of adventure. So, at the start of October, I'm off to the Northern Vosges, where tour guide Alice and a few Pegasus guests have already gathered in the cosy riders' parlour. After some sparkling wine and pumpkin cream soup, we head over in high spirits to the horses, who are waiting for us in the open stable. As a lightweight rider, I'm assigned a cute little Irish Cob mare who has a foal this year. Little 'Mona Lisa' is incredibly affectionate and quickly wins our hearts. However, she's to stay at home for the ride. Alice mainly has Irish Cobs, as she really values the breed for its calm nature. They really are very sweet and completely safe horses, who are set to give us a brilliant weekend. On Thursday afternoon, we spend two hours riding through the surrounding beech forest, along old sunken tracks – once used to drive pigs into the woods – and along lovely narrow paths. The ground is nicely sandy and therefore not slippery at all. We already sense that we've ended up in a real rider's paradise. The Northern Vosges, together with the Palatinate Forest, form one huge rider's paradise! When we return, a large, delicious salad buffet is soon laid out for us, and an inviting fire is burning in the courtyard, where we sit together for a while after our meal.



The next day, I'm given a new horse, as the broodmare isn't yet fit enough for a day's ride. 'Cassie' is an older Berber cross mare and the perfect trail horse. In

the super-comfortable summer trail riding saddles, you can ride comfortably all day long. The route takes us first across farmland and then back along good forest tracks, which occasionally allow for a gallop or a trot. In the middle of the forest, we come across a wire mesh fence surrounding a fenced-off hole in the ground. A historic site – this is where the first oil well in Europe was drilled at the end of the 15th century. Oil is still extracted in Pechelbronn today, and there's even a museum dedicated to it. Shortly afterwards, we reach a historic mill, idyllically situated in a large clearing. Here, we let the horses graze in a huge pasture whilst we enjoy a meal in the mill's dining room. You can also stay overnight here in the picturesque half-timbered buildings. Alice persuades us to try a 'Picon' – a strong beer with a shot of spirits – which goes perfectly with the hearty Alsatian meal now being served to us. The sun is shining and we're enjoying a wonderful autumn day. The return journey takes us back through the seemingly endless forest, still green after the lovely late summer.

For dinner tonight, we're having tarte flambée, freshly baked by Alice's husband in the oven. Full and content, we fall into our beds. The guesthouse may be simple, but the old-style rooms are originally furnished. We all notice the soothing silence, even though the riding centre is on the outskirts of the village: not a single sound disturbs our sleep; here, the fox and the hare truly do say goodnight to one another.



The next day we set off on a two-day ride. Saturday is a particularly long and particularly beautiful day's riding. First we ride through the woods, past a small and a large wartime bunker, situated on an important defensive line, the 'Maginot Line'. Even more impressive to me than the bunkers are a whole row of curved iron posts, driven metres deep into the ground here to ward off tanks and soldiers. Not a pleasant thought... Today, the area is exceptionally peaceful. We ride through idyllic orchards, through beautiful, tranquil half-timbered villages, through woodland and finally past Falkenstein Castle and imposing sandstone cliffs that suddenly rise metres high from the forest. Along the way, we enjoy a delicious picnic in the woods with cheese, salami and

red wine. That, however, was nothing compared to what awaited us at our destination. We stabled the horses at a riding centre in an open stable. In the barn next door, the owners conjured up a magnificent champagne reception with salami, hearty Gugelhupf and so on. The warm-hearted hosts created a great atmosphere, and in high spirits we later made our way to the local hotel. The hotel is very comfortable and the dinner is of the highest quality. After all that feasting, we sleep soundly in the cosy beds.



The next day, another new horse awaits me, brought in by trailer. It is a small, 5-year-old grey. Despite his age, he is completely relaxed, even as we ride through a slightly larger town where, for once, there is a bit of traffic. As we ride through the forest near the German border, we discover more castles and pure nature all around us.

After a gallop or two, we reach an idyllic river valley, which we follow. After a final picnic in a meadow, we make our way back through the woods to the stables, and it's already time to say goodbye again. Alice also offers rides in Alsace near Colmar, the High Vosges and as far as the Palatinate Forest – an ideal destination for repeat visitors!

Jessica Kiefer, 23 October

Link to the offer: www.reiterreisen.com/alista.htm

