EUROPEAN PATHS OF WOOD AND WATER

International Timber Raftsmen

EUROPEAN PATHS OF WOOD AND WATER

Germany

Austria

Slovenia

Spain

Finland

France

Italy

Latvia

Poland

Romania

Russia

Czech Republic

In the '80s, they experienced a brief renaissance in east Germany, as there was a shortage of supplies, due to the obligation to provide tax information for the planned economy; however, this never reached a significant level.
The rafts disappeared due to the spread of the railways, which transported the wood more easily and faster; moreover, the construction of the first dams made the passage of logs virtually impossible.
In December 2014, Timber Rafting was included in the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Germany.

Transportation of driftwood (loose wood)

We can be sure that the practice of transporting wood through drift is older than that of transporting the wood with rafts or by tying tree trunks together. However, there are no records, nor is there any information, available on the subject. The timber was thrown into the river at one point, and in another point, it was taken back onto the land. In the majority of cases, in later times, this was firewood, whereas valuable wood was tied together when it was transported. Wood was especially transported through drifting in the spring and autumn, when rivers carried more water. Specific canals were also built. One of the most important ones was the Elsterflossgraben canal, which was 93 kilometres long. It supplied firewood to the cities of Merseburg and Leipzig, among others.
In contrast to the trunks which were tied into rafts, in the larger rivers, the transport of wood through drift ruled in the currents of the uplands. This is because their low water levels made the transport of trunks tied into rafts impossible. In order to guarantee an adequate water supply, it was often necessary to store water in pools or ponds. Wood was collected in these, and it was usually allowed to fall into the river when the ice melted.

In order to do this, it was essential that the different river users come to an agreement. This was because the drift wood could be introduced into the diversion channels caused by river equipment such as windmills, sawmills, fulling mills or pile drivers.
As these establishments had to close the floodgates in order to avoid damage from logging, the timber industry was obliged to pay a tax for its activity.
The transport of drift wood disappeared at the same time as the rafts disappeared from the rivers of Germany. One of the main reasons why it was abandoned was that around 2 to 3% of the wood was lost due to sinking.

Rivers and Important Places for Timber Rafting

In the Danube region, there were many facilities for the storage and transport of wood and rafts. Among the most important are some with a long tradition:
- Schwarzenberg canal in Bohemia.
- River facilities in Upper Austria:
• Aist (1799-1947)
• Maltsch (before 1685 to 1842)
• Naarn (1755-1938)
• Sarmingbach (1765)
Canal from the forest of the Kamp valley, above Rosenburg
- From the forests of Vienna through the Wiener Neustadt Canal
From the Franconian forest, the rafts also sailed heavily through the Rodach, Main and Rhine rivers to Holland. The Weser Basin (as well as the Werra, Fulda, Aller and Leine rivers, and the Harz area) were areas of intense rafting. The city of Hann in particular stands out in this area. Munden also benefited from this type of timber transport, due to the its stacking rights.
In the Saxony area, the wood traveled through the Elbe, the Mulde, the Weisse Elster and its tributaries and streams, coming from the mountains of the Elbsandsteingebirge and the Erzgebirge, both heavily populated by forests. As well as large settlements, the customers were the metallurgical companies. It is worth mentioning that at the time, the largest logging port was Pirna.