

## “Harter Brocken” - or: acquittal for the bark beetle

The crime film Secret Code (produced in 2019) from the series “Harter Brocken” was recently shown on TV. Actually, it could also be called Harzer Brocken, because the film is set in the Harz [municipality of St. Andreasberg and Braunlage] and in the Harz, the highest elevation is called Brocken [1,141 meters]. It is remarkable that the spruce forest in the Harz is dying or already dead in many places. In some areas, there are no more old spruces [Picea abies] and only spruces grow back - it looks like a Christmas tree plantation, except that the young spruces are not trellised, because they grow to different heights, i.e. there is natural forest regeneration. We recently visited the Harz Mountains and were disappointed and have now been able to expose the film Harter Brocken as a fake concerning the portrayal of the forest.

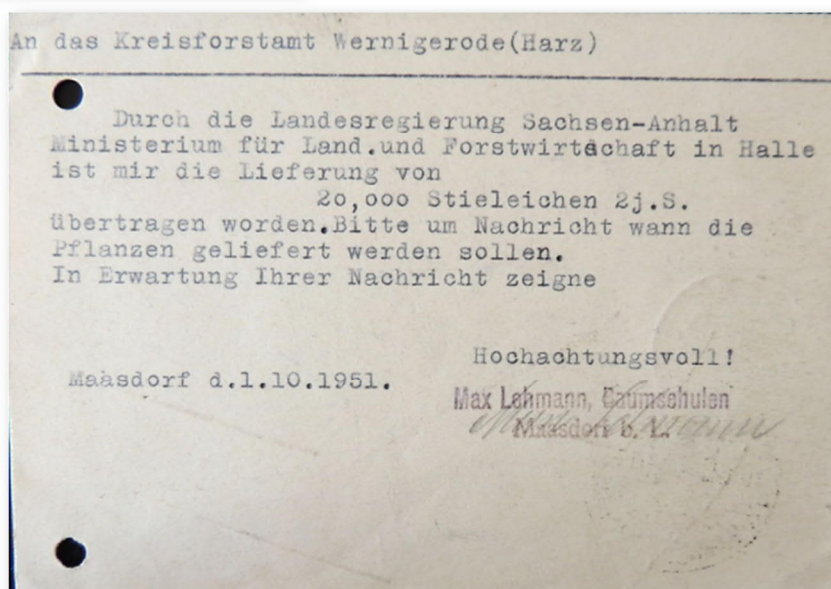
I was also inspired to write this article by this card from 1951 from a forest garden (vulgo Baumschule) in



Maasdorf (Elster) to the district forestry office in Wernigerode /Harz. From a philatelic point of view, remarkably, the rate for postcards from 1946 onwards was 12 Pf. for long-distance traffic; why in this case a surcharge of 18 Pf. would have had to be paid for the card of 5.10.1951 according to Bläuel remains unexplained. Obviously, the post office noticed the mistake and crossed out the “Nachgebüh” stamp again. In any case, three days after posting in Bad Liebenwerda, the card received the postmark from the

recipient - we can assume that the card was also read at the district forestry office; however, according to the note, it was sent back. The stamp shows the first and only state president of the GDR, Wilhelm Pieck. The English oak mentioned on the card is also called German oak.

The fact that the Harz region is an old mining area is undisputed; that the forest was raped in the past is undeniable; that fast-growing spruce was also used for afforestation in lowlands is a fact. In 2007, the hurricane Kyrill massively damaged the forest, starting at the forest edges



and sweeping its way through the forests, because the spruce forest usually stands in the landscape without a protective forest edge like a wall of boards and offers hurricane gusts the best attack surfaces. But the wounds inflicted on the forest by Kyrill 15 years ago have healed to the extent that the spruces

were left lying in the national park, while outside the park the wood was harvested and processed as best as possible and, as mentioned before, natural young forest is growing back. But as noted at the beginning: the spruce forest is dying or is already dead. This refers to those areas that survived Kyrill.

Where should we look for the causes? As is so often the case, it is the unreasonable person [here the forester] who is exposed to a material pressure to succeed and has planted and is still planting fast-growing spruce in valley areas. He will win applause wherever it works, but where today there are withered spruces, where there are massive clear-cuts, there today the bark beetle is exclusively to blame. Now one may argue like this, indeed one must, if one does not want to admit one's own mistakes. Therefore, it should be pointed out at this point that the bark beetle is only doing its job and trying to correct man's mistakes. It only wants the corpses to be cleaned up as quickly as possible. Man would have to realize and learn that spruce should only be planted from altitudes above 700 meters (the altitude varies depending on the location) - otherwise one must resort to the mixed forest. Beech and oak trees can hardly be harvested by the human generation that planted the deciduous trees - but let's be honest: how often do we hear that someone wants to do good for their descendants...?



The spruce is actually boreal and alpine in distribution; the Harz is one of the last "spruce islands" in northern Germany. That the weather is changing is undisputed. Hot and dry summers are becoming the rule - with precipitation that often pours far more liters onto the square meter in just a short time than used to be the case. Spruce forests, as in the Harz, will no longer be able to cope. Forests with undergrowth are a help against mudslides, mixed forests a way to arm our forests against windthrow. All this takes time and usually a new generation of forest owners and foresters. And we should

believe the people from the nature park when they write on their website: "In the lower and middle altitudes, the deciduous forests that were originally native here are increasingly reestablishing themselves" and "Storms, weather extremes and bark beetles are causing the mostly man-dominated, older spruce forests in the national park to die off over large areas. Depending on the altitude, beech trees or young spruce trees are more likely to establish themselves afterwards.

*Further reading:* Forest development in the Harz National Park - available at <https://www.nationalpark-harz.de/de/der-nationalpark-harz/waldentwicklung/>

This page shows us ways out of the forest crisis: <https://www.dw.com/de/waldsterben-f%C3%BCr-deutsche-w%C3%A4lder-gilt-es-jetzt-oder-nie-g-5873863>

