

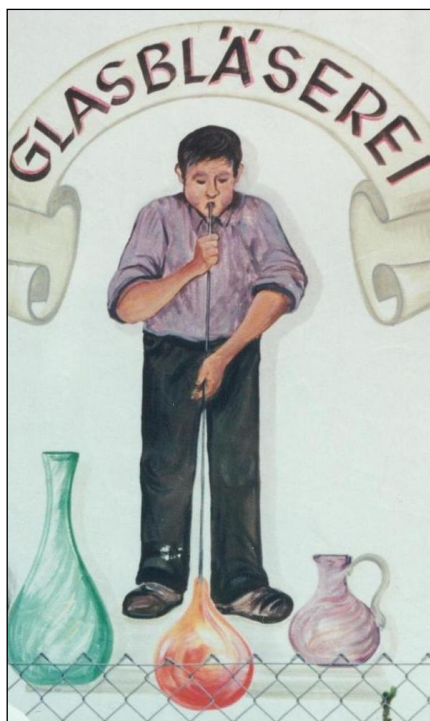
Following the Glass Road to the Eisenstein Villages

Bayerisch Eisenstein (Bavaria) and Markt Eisenstein (Bohemia)
(Markt Eisenstein is now called Zelezná Ruda and is in the Czech Republic)

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Eisenstein tradition holds that many who settled in the Eisenstein valley originally came from the northern section of the Austrian Tyrol. They might well have followed the “glass road” which had its beginnings in northern Italy and eventually made its way into Bavaria and Bohemia. Glass was being manufactured in Venice, Italy in the thirteenth century. The city was in the southern part of the Tyrol, the region that also included the western part of Austria. Glassmakers from Northern Italy moved into the Tyrolean Mountains of Austria to obtain the necessary potash from “ash burners” (Aschenbrenners) to make their glass. By the late 1400’s and early 1500’s, glassmaking inspired by the Venetian Renaissance had gained importance in the German states.

In the late 1500’s, Venetian craftsmen moved north, bringing their trade with them in the hopes of earning a better living. A new type of glass suitable for cutting and engraving was perfected in Bohemia and Bavaria in the 1600’s. Glassworks were established throughout the region and by the eighteenth century, Bohemian and Bavarian glass had received world-wide recognition (“Glass”, “History of Czech Glassmaking”).



Billboard in Bayerisch Eisenstein
(Photo by SAM 1999)

The Werdenfels Museum, located in the picturesque town of Garmisch-Partenkirchen, in southern Bavaria, provides evidence of this connection between Venice, Bavaria, and the borderlands of Bohemia. The museum contains artifacts that document the history and culture of the Werdenfels area. This was a region ruled by the Freising prince-bishops and was independent for 700 years, until it was secularized and became a part of Bavaria in 1802. Traces of more than two thousand years of history reveal an important trade route, linking Italy, Tyrol and Bavaria. Certainly, glassmakers followed this road from Venice to Bavaria and Bohemia.

Glass factories began to be built in the forests, because glassmaking required lots of wood fuel for the furnaces. For two hundred years, beginning with the early 1700s, the richly wooded Eisenstein valley on the Bavarian/ Bohemian border was considered a

leader in the production of forest glass. The glassworks industry served not only to produce glass, but also to clear the land to make it suitable for agriculture. The glassworks established in the forest developed into “factory towns”. In addition to acquisition of raw materials and glassmaking, the owners concerned themselves with construction of carriages, farms, and housing for the workers.

From *The Glass Road* comes this description of glassmaking in southeastern Bavaria: “The first glassworks is said to have existed as early as 1300 in the area of Lam- in Engelshütt. [...] In the area around Bayerisch and Markt Eisenstein, glass production did not begin until the 18th Century. Here, the Hafenbrädl Family was especially active, once having been the most important glass-making family of the Bavarian Forest. In only two centuries, they accumulated legendary wealth, yet in 1896, the last Hafenbrädl closed the

firm and died in complete poverty (60-62).”

Today, there are several hiking paths along the Bavarian/Bohemian border which lead through beautiful countryside and past the sites of former glassworks.



Markt Eisenstein, now Zelezna Ruda, Czech Republic (Photo by SAM 1998)

Sources:

The Glass Road: Culture in Eastern Bavaria. Ed. Tourismusverband Ostbayern. Regensburg, Germany: Fr. Ant. Niedermayr, 1998.

“History of Czech Glassmaking.” Feel Bohemian.com. Web 16 July 2006.