

Fog Holler heads to Europe – part 1

Posted on [May 17, 2023](#) by [Guest Contributor](#)

[Fog Holler](#) is a young bluegrass band from Portland, OR with a modern approach to this traditional art form. Or as they like to say, It's a new shade of grass." As they head off on an extended European tour, the band has agreed to share their experiences in a travel blog, available exclusively here at Bluegrass Today. Kianna Mott-Smith, the band's manager, will be our tour guide.

Greetings, Bluegrass Today readers. For the next six weeks, I will be the fly on the wall letting you in on the juicy tidbits of Fog Holler's European tour. As their tour manager, I'll be traveling with them from the snuggest medieval bar to the grandest concert hall, keeping tabs on all their exploits for your reading pleasure. Genießen!

Your eyes, ears, and snarky commentator, Kianna

On Tuesday, May 2, Tommy Schulz (guitar), Lillian Sawyer (fiddle), Noa (bass fiddle), and yours truly gathered at the home of Fog Holler's banjo player, Casey James Holmberg. Bags were evaluated. Repacks were executed. Snacks were hoarded. Double checks ensued. And then it was time to leave – three hours on the road from Portland to Seattle, two plane rides and another three hour drive, and after over 24 hours of travel they arrived at a charming hostel in Vlissingen, Netherlands.

The energy there was palpable. Liberation Day was just around the corner and locals had already started celebrating. When the day came, the fates of bluegrass smiled on the band, and the rain that had started the previous night cleared. The sun began to shine as Fog Holler took the stage, and the crowd rapidly grew in size and excitement as Fog Holler's music got their feet stomping and their hands clapping.

The next day it was off to Bühl, Germany for the international Bühler Bluegrass Festival. Playing to a packed concert hall of around 500 people, the band stole the hearts of those fine German folks. The response was overwhelming – the audience was positively ebullient, and they couldn't wait to tell the band. Some had printed photos of the band at home and brought them to the concert for the band to sign. Many asked to have photos taken, and for signatures on the CDs they'd just purchased. It felt like a peek into the world of celebrity, to receive such a response from this huge crowd of people. The band was riding high that night, pinching themselves a little, and ready to carry the incredible energy from that German crowd with them to their next shows.

Casey is the only one in the band with much experience driving a manual transmission, so the next few days were a herculean effort on his part, safely ferrying the band and all their gear first to the French Alps, and then into Switzerland. There were a few days off around this time, filled with some of the best culinary experiences of the trip thus far. A local boulangerie from the French alps provided incredible breads stuffed with cheeses, sausage, and herbs. A little beurre from the prolific dairy farms nearby, a little jambon, and we felt rather French ourselves. C'était très bon! Next we traveled to Gruyères, Switzerland and indulged in a traditional fondue. If you've never tried dipping tasty morsels into a pot of hot, bubbling cheese, Fog Holler highly recommends.

In Geneva the band had their first experience playing for the Swiss people. They had a show in a record shop called Urgence Disk, which is located in the belly of L'Usine, the home of Genevan punks for more than four decades. The space was tiny, not more than

20'x20', but by showtime people had packed in like sardines. They were a very vocal crowd, both during the show and after, when several folks told Fog Holler this was the best bluegrass they'd seen all year. It was a wild experience to feel a similar energy to the show in Bühl, but in a completely different city and environment.

Much like Urgence Disk, the band's next destination was also lovingly and deliberately carved out for folks who feel they don't belong in more mainstream spaces. Rümpletom exists in an industrial area of Saint Gallen, near railroad tracks and warehouses, and is home to a passionate group of folks who welcomed Fog Holler with open arms. The venue owner cooked an enormous family meal, for the band and the folks who treat Rümpletom as their home away from home. The obvious community support for this venue was truly moving. The crowd really knew how to party, throwing themselves into the beat, stomping their feet, sending dreadlocks flying with every head bang. It was a singular experience that the band won't soon forget.

That brings us to last night. I sit here writing this in the upper levels of an Enlightenment-era grain mill, though the original building (unfortunately long-since burned down) was built in 1599. The ceilings are very low, which is a comical and occasionally painful situation for this very tall band (the head bump count is over a dozen now, I believe). The crowd from last night packed into the lowest level, a cellar that used to house the mill's wheel. What was originally meant to be no more than a two hour show stretched into three hours as Fog Holler responded to crowd's appreciation and excitement. It was a wonderful and rewarding way to end their first week in Europe.

Well, that's all for now, folks. Till next time – auf wiedersehen!