

Binocular History Society Meeting – Wetzlar, Germany - October, 2007

More than seventy binocular collectors, historians, scientists and other interested parties gathered at the Zeiss Sports Optics facility in Wetzlar to visit with old friends, listen to papers of interest, sell and buy binoculars and enjoy a good time. Mother Nature cooperated nicely with fine autumn weather for the event. The employees of the Zeiss Sports Optics group were wonderful hosts and exhibited many of their fine optics for attendees to examine. One of the more interesting being a combination eyepiece and four megapixel camera for use with the Zeiss spotting scopes. A walking tour of the old city of Wetzlar was lead by a local historian who explained the long and storied history of the Wetzlar optical industry and pointed out many of the old buildings associated with such luminaries as Kellner, Leitz, Hensoldt, and Barnack. Tilman Taube provided a running translation of the tour leader's comments for those of us not fluent in German.

Twelve countries were represented at the meeting with John Rowan of New Zealand receiving a prize for the longest distance traveled. In addition, Spain, France, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, The Netherlands, USA, UK, Germany, Switzerland and **Austria** were all represented. Our youngest member Denis Puchbauer, age 19 came from Winneneden, Germany and our oldest Hubert Otto, a Flakhelfer when he was a boy, age 80 from Barienrode, Germany. Both received awards to remind them of their participation.

As part of the event, an exhibit of binoculars was arranged where more than seventy very special optics were on display. I have listed some of them below.

The Early Zeiss Feldstecher Series from 1894-1907:

- Three pair of Togo 5&10 Marine Revolver binoculars, the oldest being serial number 155
- Very rare 3X14 Theaterglas Feldstecher in original brown paint
- 4X11 C. Zeiss marked Feldstecher from 1895 – S/N 575
- 6X15 Luxus Feldstecher
- 4X14 Feldstecher originally sold in Simla, India – S/N 634
- Teleplast 5X20 with the information of the original owner from Jena
- DF 3X made in very small numbers for the Fussartillerie – S/N 238
- 8X20 military glass marked Feldartilleriet and Forstor = 8 – No. 181

Binoculars from the era of 1908-1930

- DF 4X by Zeiss based on the Turol design - 1914
- DF 8X from WW I but repaired after WW II and given a new serial number by Zeiss
- Zeiss Teletur 6X15 Theaterglas in gold and lizard finish. No other Teleturs are known to be finished this way.
- Zeiss 6x30 marked Riga in the logo
- Voigtlander 12X60 with roof prism design circa 1920
- Goerz binocular with Goerz-Paris logo
- Goerz 10X52.5 - S/N 38
- Voigtlander WW I torpedo boat binocular periscope – found in the water at Marseille harbor
- Zeiss 6x30 for the British Military and marked “Lawrence von Arabia”
- Hensoldt 5x35
- Zeiss 18X50 Delfort
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- Hensoldt 6X26 of unusual design believed to be an early prototype
- Zeiss Telsexo 16x40
- Zeiss Telefort 12X30 with traces of gold plating and inscription of appreciation from the Murrumdurrah Turf Club in Australia

- Zeiss 7X50 Noctar (with all good prisms!)
- Two very unusual early Zeiss binoculars with center focusing accomplished by turning a single ocular. One an 8X24 Trentactem and the other an 8X30
- Goerz Stereo Binocle from 1899 – a rare photo camera in a field glass body
- Huet 15X32 Extra Puissante terrestrial telescope with brass range estimating plates mounted to the barrels.

Binoculars After 1920

- Post-war Zeiss Jena 7X40 Septarem
- blc 8x60
- Zeiss 7X50 H
- blc 8X60 in original storage box with mount and sunshades
- Zeiss 15X60 for use with 4 meter rangefinder (yes – 15X60!)
- Zeiss 8X30 Deltrintem with both Zeiss and Docter Optik markings – probably one of the last few Zeiss glasses before tooling was turned over to Docter Optik.
- Zeiss 7X50 Binocem S/N 2266765 of short body construction
- Busch 10X80 with 45 degree angle
- blc 6X30 with both ocular and objective focusing mechanisms
- Zeiss 12X60H from 1935

Two awards were presented to exhibitors.

Jürgen Laucher received one for his Zeiss Marine Revolver and the interesting story of how it was assembled from two unique halves of the binocular, one acquired at a flea market and the other from eBay. Jürgen assembled the pieces, recovered the bodies with correct leather and painted the brass pieces to make an almost new binocular.

Anna and Terry Vacani displayed a very interesting Hensoldt glass believed to be an early prototype. It clearly resembles the early arched top Hensoldt binoculars but has enough differences to be an early design prototype. None are known from collections or catalogs.

Papers and Discussions

- Jürgen Laucher presented a paper on the nature of the markings of the earliest Zeiss binoculars. He provided evidence that the script engraving was individually done by different craftsmen. Spectro analysis showed the primary composition of the material used to produce the raised marking was a mixture of tin and bismuth and that used to fill the engraving with white highlight was titanium oxide.
- Wolfgang Wimmer, Zeiss Archivist, presented his findings concerning recently found documents detailing the early production of binoculars at Zeiss in 1894-1895. Record books showing serial numbers assigned and production quantities will be very helpful to future researchers.
- Richard Faltermair discussed the research he had done that traced the development of the porro prism optical system and the first examples of the Porro II design.
- Walter Besenmatter delivered a very informative presentation outlining the history of the Hensoldt binocular from the very earliest years through the introduction of the modern Dialyt in the 1930's. His comments on the legal arguments with Zeiss during the early years were most interesting.
- Ulrich Zuen is a teacher of the visually impaired who uses monoculars in his work and as a result has developed an interesting and extensive collection of monoculars from the 1800's through modern times. He presented an interesting and educational paper on the monocular through the years with excellent photos of some of the very earliest instruments that were in use years before the development of the binocular.

- Thomas Mix explained how his research on Zeiss binoculars manufactured between 1907 and 1920 in Jena, St. Petersburg, Riga, **Wien**, Gyor, and London allowed him to identify various manufacturing details that provide clues to assist in dating and identifying place of manufacture of these early binoculars.
- Hans Braakhuis traced the development of the Nikko Mikron (Nikon) from 1922 through the 1990's. He raises an interesting question as to whether the Nikko Micron or the August Busch Fata Morgana came first.
- Hans Seeger gave us a tantalizing preview of his new book on Zeiss binoculars. He covers in great detail the evolution of the binocular not only at Zeiss but also the impact that Zeiss had on others. There is no firm date for publication at this time but the project is well underway and will be a terrific addition to anyone's library.
- Tilman Taube of Leica provided an update on dating and identifying early Leitz binoculars. A recent catalog from Argentina has surfaced that shows the very first binocular, the 6X18. Last year Tilman displayed the early record books that detail the production and shipping records of the early Leitz binoculars, allowing historians to date items of significant history.
- Walter Schoen is writing a book on the design and use of binoculars. He has extensive experience in the area of technical writing and presented a very interesting technical explanation of the nature of binocular vision through porro prism and roof prism binoculars. He also provided a basis for explaining the apparent difference in depth of field between roof and porro prism binoculars.
- Gijs van Ginkel traced the development of telescopes and then binoculars from ancient times through to modern times, proving an interesting insight into binocular history with an especially interesting look at binocular development in the Netherlands.

All in all, this was a great meeting. Jürgen Laucher (with the able assistance of his wife Inge) did a fine job of organizing the event and Zeiss was a very generous host, providing snacks, refreshments and lunches in addition to the meeting room. Walter Schwab of the international sales department was exceptionally helpful.

At the end of the meeting, a poll of the participants provided very good feedback and suggestions for future meetings. There was a strong preference to continue with meetings in Wetzlar since there is such optical history here, but suggestions were also made for meeting with Swarovski in Austria, in Jena, in conjunction with the Bavarian Military museum near Munich and at the Optical museum in **Rathenow near Berlin**. A show of hands indicated that more than half of the participants would come to the US for a future meeting.

Jack Kelly