

Verboten

by Matt Potter

Casey is a big woman. I was reminded of this at the airport, my hug unable to circumnavigate her.

So Berlin summer 2009 proved challenging. Because fat people were banned from taking the S-Bahn.

Dicke Leute verboten, the black and yellow signs read. *Fat People forbidden*.

Scales were installed on station platforms. Those who were overweight were turned away.

These were extenuating circumstances. S-Bahn authorities had not kept up regular maintenance. A derailment revealed faults with thousands of carriages. Some train lines went from running every three minutes to every twenty. Others were cancelled indefinitely.

Commuters were also asked to leave bikes and pushers home, saving space on the too-infrequent services. And Berlin newspapers published *Die offizielle S-Bahn Diät*. It included — as exercise — *not* taking the S-Bahn, and eating low-fat wurstchen.

Still, one day, we shoehorned Casey onto the S-Bahn. Other train-goers glared. And her voice — brash, nasal, American — echoed throughout the carriage: “God, it’s so crowded in here!”

“Yes,” said an older Berliner, her English accented. “And you are taking all the oxygen.”

The comment was fair. Casey is a heavy breather.

We soon realised the six-station trip to Alexanderplatz was impossible, and got off at Bellevue. We thought we would work on our tans in Tiergarten. But we were stopped at the entrance to the park by a guard, forbidding grimace barring our way.

Casey was too fat for the park, he said. There is an official allowance of sun per person, and Casey had exceeded the limit.

