

# Check out the sewers!

IT'S not exactly your usual piece of travel advice.

When in Cologne for the weekend, book an appointment with the city authorities and head into the sewers.

But then Duncan J D Smith - the Sheffield author of seven guide books which have sold more than 150,000 copies - isn't exactly your usual travel writer.

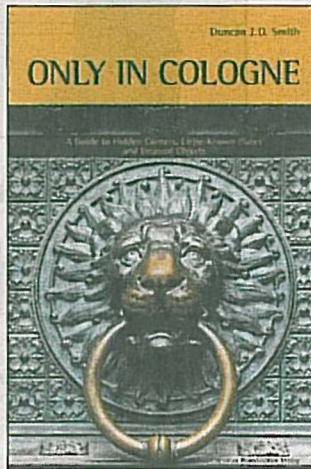
Rather he proclaims himself an urban explorer, dresses like Indiana Jones and puts his success down to a boy-ish thirst for knowledge about the unusual.

"I always look up," he says. "And I always go down, because that's where the interesting bits of any city are. At eye level, you're just seeing what is developed every few years."

Indeed, it was going down which lead him to the murky sewers of German's fourth city - the place his seventh guide book, *Only in Cologne*, is about.

There he discovered a grand subterranean world unlike anything anywhere else on the planet.

"There are chandeliers hanging in there," says the 50 year old. "It wasn't built until the late 19th century so it's quite modern and because of that it's very grand, ornamental even, picturesque - and then at the bottom you can just make out this underground canal full of filth."



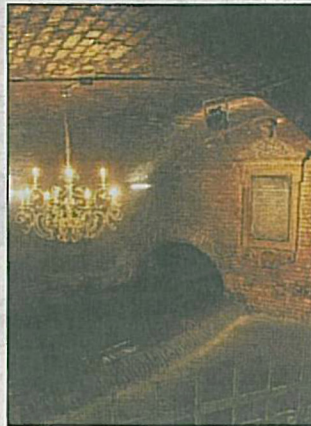
The chandeliers were installed because the Emperor of Germany was due to officially open the system in 1890. In the end he never turned up but the lighting stayed.

"It's remarkable," says Duncan, who also recommends the city's replica coal mine under the university main hall and its Gothic cathedral.

Remarkable too is Duncan's own journey from a book seller to a unique author with his own series.

It began, as many things do, with a girl - Roswitha, 40, from Austria.

They met in Ecclesall, Sheffield, where he grew up and both were living in 1998. When she moved to Vienna a couple of years later, Duncan



## Chandelier: Cologne sewers

followed.

"The first weekend was great," he says. "But then she went to work on Monday and I had no idea what to do. So I went exploring."

Wandering the city he took photos, made notes and asked questions about things he couldn't find in guide books.

Then, drawing on the experience of producing two small guides to Sheffield's curiosities 10 years earlier, he wrote it all down and took it to a publisher on the off chance others might be interested in the same hidden corners.

"They got back to me three days later, said they loved it and asked to publish it in German and English," he says.

That was 2003. The book was *Only In Vienna*. Since



## Alternative view: Duncan J D Smith loves exploring

then he's done Budapest, Prague, Berlin, Hamburg and Munich. In 2012 Zurich will be added.

"I feel lucky because finding out about places is what I

love doing," he says. "I'm trying to push the publishers for some even more exotic places - I'd love to do one on Istanbul and Cairo - but I'm happy just to be doing this."