THE MATTRESS-MAKER

There is a plant that grows in the Outre-Forêt that is called carex pseudobrizoides, or *Seegrass* in Alsace patois. The vegetal hair grows abundantly throughout the forest of Haguenau. In the older days only lumberjacks were allowed to cut down the plant as this represented a side income for them. The vivacious plant was dried and used as stuffing for mattresses and cushions.

**Stages in weaving vegetal threads:**

1. The plants were first spread out on a large flat surface. After creating the starting point for the mattress, Mr. Buttner the mattress-maker picked up several armfuls as he proceeded with the weaving. Here, the plant is perfectly dry. After picking, the plants are always left to dry in the sun.
2. The spinning reel ‘*Seegraslyre’* is operated by Mrs. Buttner. That is the post that is planted firmly in the ground. It has a crank and a hook on its extremity. That is where the threads are attached to.
3. Here, Mr. Buttner is preparing a large brain. He finishes it and makes a double braid. The leaves of the carex plant are long and sharp. There is a special method for pulling the plants out without cutting oneself. It is passed on from one generation to the next.
4. Then there is the production place.
5. There was also string rope: here, the braid is finer. This was used to tie several large braids together. Such braids could be used to protect ceramic pipes from shock during shipping for instance.
6. The vegetal hair was used as stuffing for our grandparents or great-grandparents mattresses. We can see a third person who is untying a braid from last year: this is the mattress-maker. For us, she has agreed to reproduce the skills she learned in her time.
7. Mr Buttner is starting a new braid! In the afternoon of June 10th 2001, he repeated the gestures several times for curious visitors to illustrate how people used to work with vegetal hair. Later, horsehair would replace the vegetal strands.
8. Ms Trommetter is undoing what Mr Buttner had woven last year. Nice curls formed in the braid, after one year’s rest they will make for quite a soft small mattress! Dried grass that was not twisted in this way would not have such elasticity.
9. No sooner said than done, the mattress-maker has measured the cot, cut the unbleached fabric with coloured stripes and sewn the mattress cover on three sides. Using the remaining side, she stuffs or fills the cover with vegetal hair.