

Location: Lausanne to Great St. Bernard's Pass

From the 22nd of July to the 29th of July we walked up the Vaud and Drance Valleys starting at Lausanne and finishing at Great St Bernard's Pass. The walk is approximately 125 km's climbing from 495 meters to 2,469 meters passing through many small rural villages on the way... and the occasional industrial town.

St Bernard's Pass was the main thoroughfare for the Romans in their conquest of France and Britain. Napoleon repaid the favour 1700 years later by sending 40,000 troops through the pass to invade Italy.

The walk started in a very leisurely way; for the first two days we walked around Lake Geneva. There was one uncomfortable section - two hours walk up through terraced vineyards in scorching heat. It did enable us to look back at some quite spectacular views of the lake with the mountains reflected in its surface.

Lake Geneva is well used by the locals as a recreational facility for boaters and swimmers. It is also a source for food as can be seen by this family's celebration on the catching of a very big fish, I think it is a pike, should put some protein on the table for a few days.

It took the fishermen about twenty minutes to land the fish and by this time a small crowd had gathered, including myself. Very interesting to watch some of the crowd's adverse reaction to the scene, our food is so sanitised these days

we have lost the connection between the harvesting of our foodstuffs and our eating of them at our dinner table or at a restaurant. I would like to report that the fish was killed quickly and humanely but the excitement at the size of the fish and the fight it gave meant that the enjoyment of catching it was savoured a little too long.

We stayed at two lakeside villages, Vevey and Villeneuve. Both with the own charms, this is

Carol and Leigh having a bit of fun in the square in Vevey.

At Villeneuve there is an Olympic size swimming pool set right on the lake foreshore which our little party took great delight in using after a hot day's walking.

One more ambitious member decided to try the ten-metre diving board, he was no Greg Louganis but he also did not hit his head on the board as he dived (or was that jumped) into the lake.

So far this has been an easy walk but the next day we left the lake foreshore and started to find our way up the Vaud



Valley to Saint Maurice. The mountains are starting to play their siren song as we, like Ulysses, are drawn towards a difficult path. The mountains are majestic.

A common want in walkers is to be able to see their final destination even if it is 100 kms away. The unusual aspect of the trail to St Bernard's Pass is that you don't see the pass until you are about one km from it, a strange sensation as over the days you fondly look up at the mountain range wondering if that is your destination. The trail leads you up various valleys which obscure the view. The mountain range in this photo is well before St Bernard's pass.



I have noticed in Switzerland that there is a lot of public art (usually sculptures) in the streets and other places such as in the lake itself. Many shops will have some sort of art work on their external

boarding. While walking through terraced vineyards we rounded a corner and came across this piece of art work on the terraces.



Maybe it was painted on the terraces to scare the birds away; it looked very realistic at first glance.



What the lizard did not warn us about was that we were about to do our first serious climb on this walk. It was a hot and steamy day and while the walk was in a lovely almost rainforest like environment, it added to the humidity. By the time we had climbed to the top my clothes were wringing wet with perspiration and it was the first time I seriously challenged why I was doing this, but a refuelling at a good lunch spot always makes you positive and our ultimate

destination Saint Maurice has the best pastry shop in Switzerland. They also do a very good Bircher Muesli if you ever pass this way. Next day it was an early start to Martigny. This is not a walker friendly part of the trail with some road walking on a busy road and lots of walking on tarmac on minor roads. Throw in another scorcher of a day and you need some way of cooling off. Carol decided to bath



throughout the villages.

It did not take her long to cool down her feet and we were on our way. If only she had waited for a few hundred metres and she could have had a full shower in this waterfall. Fortunately, after the waterfall the track headed back into some forest and we didn't have to walk on any tarmac until we reached our destination at Martigny, a quiet town which happens to

have a sculpture garden featuring Rodin and Max Ernst. Martigny has a long history of promoting artworks and this year is a celebration of forty years of art exhibitions. We made the effort to visit the sculpture garden, which required a longish walk, even though we knew we needed to rest up as the walk the next day had some difficult climbs.

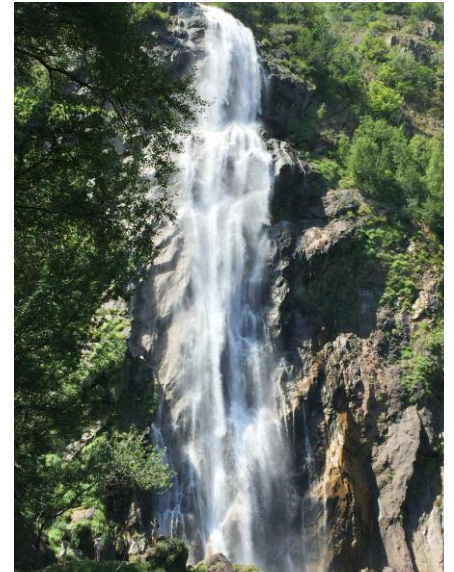
At the end of one of these climbs we came out onto a ridge where there was some agriculture happening. I got talking to a fellow who was standing watching three females weeding (isn't this always the way) and asked him what they were growing. He winked and mimed a smoking pose, a closer inspection suggested it was a plant for use in a health product such as comfrey.

We continued on our way climbing up to Orsieres an undulating walk through the foothills passing through many small settlements. Again, it is very hot. When do we reach the cool Alpine climates? You can see that both Carol and I needed a rest after the days walk. Carol has invoked the 5.00 pm rule in respect of when the appropriate time is to put on your pyjamas.



I have been looking forward to our stay at Orsieres as I knew from a past visit that the hotel we were staying in made excellent Pizzas of which we all partook and enjoyed immensely.

We knew the next day's walk was the start of some serious climbing as we are only two days from the pass, which we still can't see, so we all had an early night in the





hope of heading off straight after breakfast so we could avoid the heat. Despite our apprehension of coping with the climb, we look eager and ready to go. The owner of the hotel took the photo from a very low angle, I suspect he was trying to get the name of the hotel in the photo.

We all received a fluffy St Bernard's dog as a gift for our stay, I think I prefer the chocolate.

We should have considered what the fashion rules are in Orsieres and taken more time to choose our wardrobe. These models in the main street show our lack of dress sense.

The middle dress would look particularly attractive on Carol.

Leaving Orsieres on our way to Bourg St Pierre the initial climb out of the village was on a logging road but was a steep and long walk up. The forest was very dense consisting of mainly cypress trees and other species dispersed throughout, with a very dense understory.

We knew we were in for a tough day when we came around a corner and saw this view in front of us, spectacular but scary.



Today is our day, our mountain is waiting. So, we need to get on our way. And so, we did. There is no other way to reach the top than to keep on climbing.

These two walkers show a steely resolve to reach their destination for the day, Bourg St



Pierre which is a beautiful alpine village sadly neglected by the tourist traffic as they speedily head-on past to St Bernard's Pass.

As a neglected tourist village, the accommodation was not so great but the next day was the walk to the pass and we were prepared to put up with anything for a good night's sleep.

Leigh fuelled up by ordering the steak for dinner served up on a rather unusual plate.

Next morning our breakfast was a little sparse on healthy items, so we had to fuel up on cheese and croissants.



As we made our way up the mountain we came across this house on the side of the trail, you can see the yellow trail marker on the side of the house. The track is well signed and very easy to follow.



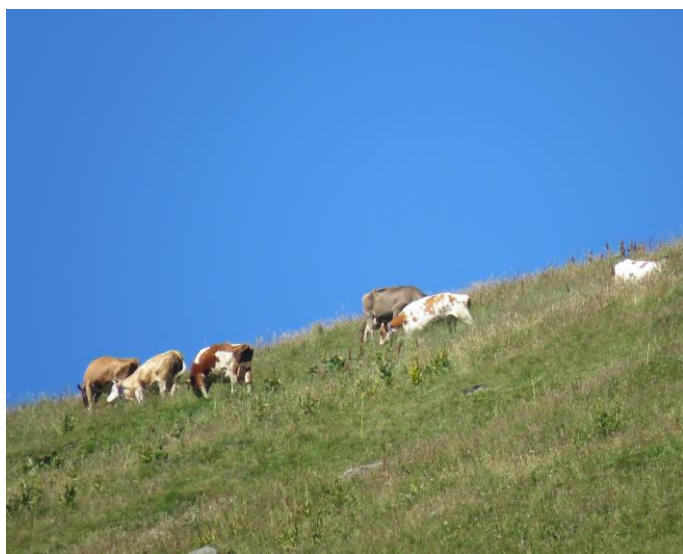
The house is close to a dam which has been constructed to provide water for a irrigation and a hydro electric system further down the valley so I am guessing that it was a workers hut now converted to overnight accommodation. Isolated but glorious views and lots of tranquillity.

If we had of known about this hut we would have stayed there but Leigh would have had to give up his steak, unless he was prepared to go out and hunt down one of the local animals grazing in the high country. The cows we saw were all in pristine

condition, ready to grace anybody's table. People must make a living but is it necessary to graze animals in these environments as we still do in Australia? There was much evidence of the damage being done by cloven-footed animals in a very sensitive alpine ecosystem. These animals were grazing at about 2,200 meters altitude.

As we walked around the next small ridge we came across a dairy farm nestled in a small valley. There was a portable dairy as part of the farm which is towed around following the grazing of the dairy cows.

There was also lots of electric fencing to keep the cows off the roads and away from buildings but nothing to keep them out of the creeks or the boggy areas where cows do a lot of damage. The alpine country both here and in





Australia is precious and should be protected for future generations, everybody should be able to experience walking through this country, even if it is just a short nature walk from a car park.

This is me contemplating why I also didn't eat the steak for dinner.

We managed to put together a more than satisfactory lunch to compensate.



As we rounded the next bend we finally got a sense of where we were going. St Bernard's pass is just to the right of this photo. You can also see the remains of an old roman road down at the bottom.

The climb into St Bernard's pass is very steep climbing around 200 meters in less than 400 meters distance. Very taxing at the end of the day.

The photo below shows the actual climb, the romans built a road down this incline to take their carriages and wagons across the path. Don't know how they managed to keep



control of the wagons on the way down. The road is under the bit of snow, the modern road is in the background switchbaking its way around the hill to the path. The Roman road went straight down.

Once on top of the pass we walked down past the lake, past the unpersoned customs house and we were back in Italy.



For a bit of contrast, this is the lake in the middle of Winter.

Tomorrow we start our descent down from the pass ending up at our final destination, Lake Viverone, which is unlikely to be snow covered.

