

Lausanne to Aosta

Km's to Rome: 999

I started day 42 as a character in an Agatha Christie novel as I travelled across Lake Geneva on a paddle steamer. There was even the cast of oddballs including a fellow who on arriving on the boat set himself up on one of the tables and promptly started typing on an old manual typewriter. He was constantly consulting a German book about philosophy. Whenever a child sat near him he would promptly give the child some paper and pencils and give the parents a lecture about how learning was not a nine to five activity it was a constant activity. He gave this lecture in three separate languages to families while I was on the ferry. The strange thing was that he didn't ask what language they spoke he had some uncanny ability to know what their first language was. Another group of adults were being pestered by a bee which they squashed on the window, he promptly got up went over to them and berated them in German. At this stage I was subtly looking for knives and guns in his typewriter case. He calmed down after awhile as we approached my stop perhaps this statue of Gandhi had a calming effect on him. This is one of many statues around the lake foreshore.

As I continued on my way to Villeneuve with my land legs working again I set a fast pace. I had to do two stages of the Via in one day so I opted for a short cut straight up the valley to Saint-Maurice. This meant that I missed a lovely walk through the foothills planted out with vineyards but seen one lovely terraced foothill seen them all. The shortcut was a pleasant walk through farmlands following rivers and canals to my destination.

I am doing a survey of the best perch dish in this area, dinner at Saint-Maurice wins the prize, worth going back for the experience.

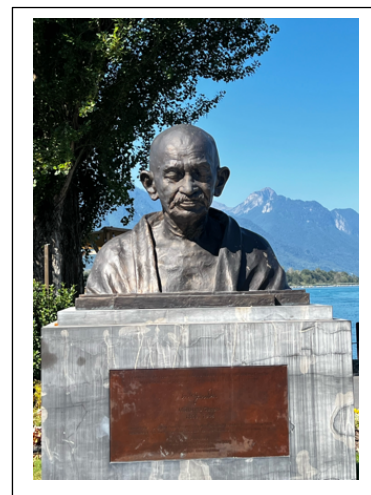
I wanted to have a potato rosti dish with it but the waiter said it

was too much and only took my order for the fish dish and a salad, ruthless Swiss efficiency but he was right, I have enjoyed the potato rosti dish here before so I was a little disappointed.

Next day was a relatively short walk to Martigny again a pleasant walk with the added benefit of some forest walking. At some stage over the next few days I have to climb to 2400 meters so the easy walking through the valley puts that thought well to the back of the mind.

On a path I came across two teenagers riding huge donkeys, the larger one over two meters high. It's rider asked me if I liked donkeys and would I like to pat hers, which I did. The donkey was 18 years old but was in superb condition. With an eye to the forthcoming climbs I asked her if she knew who

Napoleon was and that he went over St Bernard's pass on a donkey. She knew who Napoleon was but didn't know the story of the donkey. I asked her if she would take me up on her donkey but she said she had to go to school the next day so she couldn't, I think she really would have taken me up, here is a picture of them heading back home.





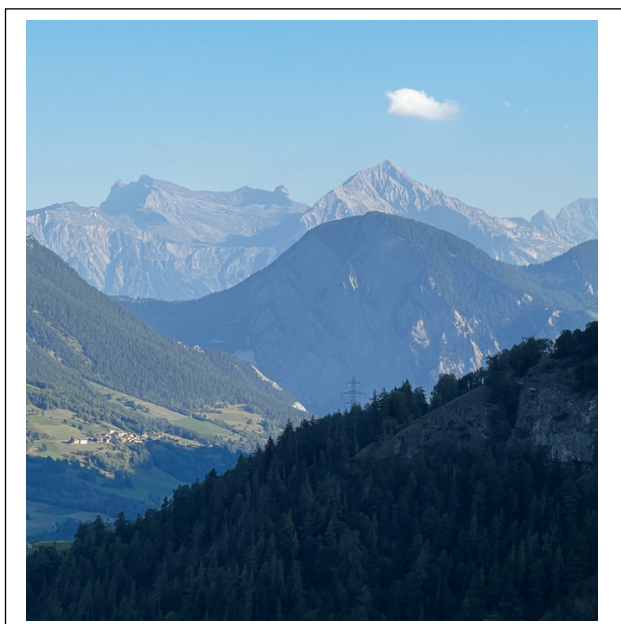
different, this is a painting of his actual traverse of the pass. I think the teenagers look more glamorous than the emperor. I



guess the emperor has no horse (sorry a real dad joke).

Day 44 from Martigny to Orsieres is the first day of real climbing, except for the distance it is as difficult as the climb to the pass as there are lots of ups and downs but still a good walk along forest paths. I was quite glad to arrive at Orsieres after a long day I was so tired I just brought some food from the local shop and didn't emerge from my room until the next morning well rested and keen for an early start to tackle the climb.

The track follows the valley up running roughly parallel with the main road over the Alps until the road disappears into a tunnel. When you are away from the car noise the stillness of the mountains is majestic, the sheer bulk of the Alps makes you realise how insignificant we are compared to the forces of nature, look deep into nature and you will understand everything better.



Readers may be familiar with this painting of Napoleon leading his troops over the pass to invade Italy. I have seen this painting and it's is quite a stunning portrait. However the reality was quite



Unfortunately there is not much snow around so I have missed out on the enjoyment of walking under the snow capped mountains but still pretty impressive.

Today I was the only person heading up the mountains most all of the people I came across were coming down not sure why this is but I must have passed around sixty people over the day. They certainly looked much better than I did as I huffed and puffed my way to the top. I thought that I was reasonably fit and hoped to get to the pass at 4:00 but it was 5:30 when I arrived. As I crested the last rise three people on motorcycles questioned my sanity in walking up, I guess it took them less than thirty minutes, it took me nine and a half hours which

is approximately an average of 2.5 kms an hour. Carrying my pack certainly makes a

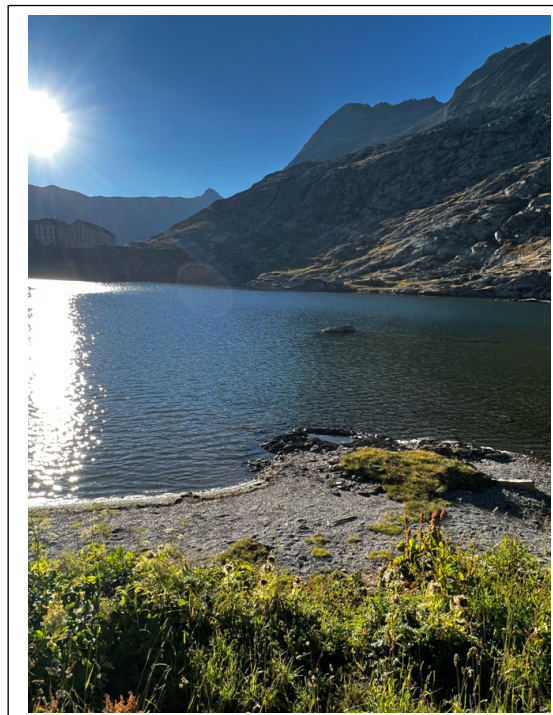


difference. There is a lake you pass on the way up which supplies the valley with water and the flow is used for hydro electricity. In the lake there is a human made island of solar panels, quite a sensible place to put them as the space is not being used for anything. The electricity produced disappeared into the side of the mountain where it must connect up with the existing grid. You can see the cable on the bottom right of the photo.

The pass on top is a beautiful place and the next morning it seemed all worthwhile to make the climb.

At the top there is a small lake that straddles the Swiss and Italian borders, it would be great to see it covered in snow. This is looking back to the Swiss side of the lake.

We always think that going down a mountain is easier but while it's physically less taxing after ten kms of constant down your knees and toes start to send out distress signals. After about 15kms it flattens out and you walk along a very pleasant track beside a canal. This is me with a wooden sculpture of a pilgrim about three kms after passing 1013 kms which is the halfway mark of my journey. I also passed through a village called Saint Leonards, who is the patron saint



of imprisoned persons and women in labour.

He became the patron saint of women in labour after seeing King Conic's queen through a difficult labour, who bore him a son.

Having a few days off in Aosta to recharge the batteries. I have attempted to do the next stage of the via twice but both times through human failings failed to complete the stage so hopefully with two days rest it will be finally conquered.

Heather has suggested a book *The Alice Network* by Kate Quinn for the travelling book club. It's available on kindle.

Bonne Camino.

