

Location: Wengen

We travelled to Wengen by train. Whoever is running the rail system in Europe should be brought over to Australia to upgrade our system. Absolute efficiency with a courteous and helpful workforce. Our final train to Wengen was part of a cog railway system servicing the Swiss Alps. The climb up was steep, but it afforded tantalising views of where we would be walking over the next few days. I had expected some snow but was surprised how much was still around in the middle of summer. This is the view from our bedroom.

We are staying at the Hotel Falken, an old-fashioned hotel straight out of an Agatha Christie novel. There are several Miss Marples sitting around in the very comfortable lounge chairs waiting for a murder to occur. I have hidden all the carving knives.



We settled into this lovely hotel very quickly. Next day we caught the cog railway further up the mountain as a prelude to visiting Jungfrauoch (the top of Europe) in the afternoon. The train took us to Kleine Scheidegg from where we walked to a lookout point at Mannlichen. This was a very steady climb up and was described as easy. It was very busy both ways. There are cable cars up from both sides of the valley to Mannlichen, so every twenty minutes

another thirty odd people started the walk. We also had to share the walk with four-legged critters, taking advantage of the late summer to enjoy a sojourn in the alps. The late summer has meant that the wildflowers are still blooming which makes this walk one of the prettiest that we have done on this trip (more about the flowers later).

We returned to the train station, so the cog train could deliver us to the Jungfrauoch, a climb of 1393 meters, mainly through tunnels carved into the mountain by pickaxe. On the train in the opposite seat

was an Islamic couple, the female being dressed in a niqab. We tend to make all manner of assumptions when we see females dressed in this manner, some not so complimentary. I was sitting there in my walking shorts, a smelly top and rather dirty shoes. I wonder how much I offended their culture with the way I was dressed. They were immaculate in their grooming but gave me no condescending looks nor did they move away. It's a universal law-- intolerance is the first sign of an inadequate education

When we reached the top and went out to the snow, people were coming back into the building appearing like ghosts out of a very small snow storm. Without realizing I took a photo of a



different Islamic couple walking in the snow. The black niqab certainly makes a stark contrast with the snow.



The path the people were coming in on was part of a 45-minute walk to a view back down the mountain over the various valleys. It wasn't cold, and the wind had died down, it was a very pleasant 23 degrees. So, we decided to set out and see the view. Carol lasted about 200 meters before she started feeling sick and extremely tired. We arranged that I would keep going and Carol would head back into the building (all underground which she did not like) and wait for me. I set off, but after a further 750 metres I

started to really struggle and had to turn back. It turns out that we both had a bit of altitude sickness which is very common because the train takes you up too fast and you don't have time to adjust to the oxygen levels.

Here I am taking refuge inside the building; you will notice I have a jumper on for the first time this trip. My sympathy to all those in Melbourne who are experiencing the loathsome weather.

We decided not to venture out again and stayed inside to enjoy the commercial attractions. The main one being the highest Lindt shop in the world which was very busy. The building structure includes a glassed-in lookout which you get to via a lift. You may have seen this structure as it has been featured in a few movies.



At this stage we both were not feeling that great, so we boarded our train and headed down again.

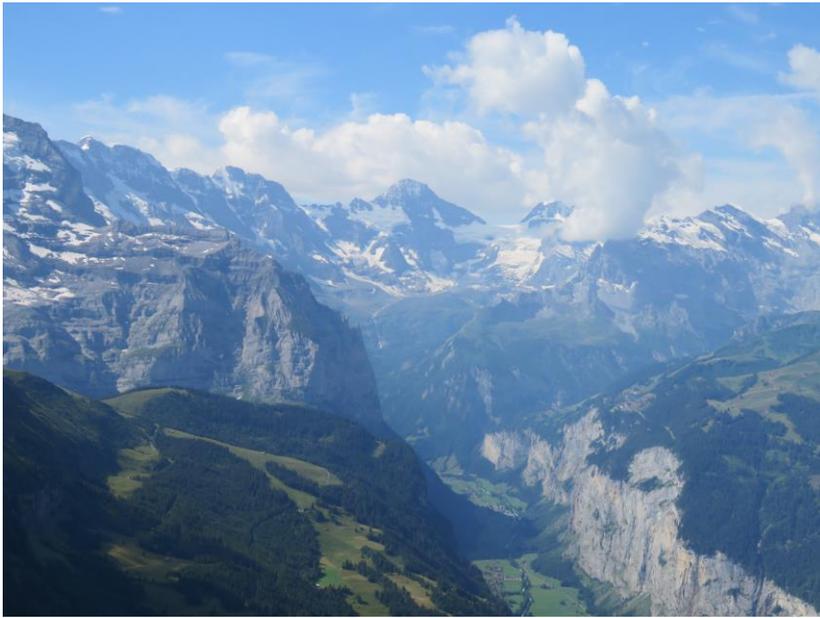
While on the train a conductor came around giving everybody a free chocolate. I have discovered this is a common practice in this part of Switzerland. We have



received quite a lot of free chocolate from hotels and shops when we purchase goods. We were glad to be back in our hotel, my symptoms however persisted, and my nose just started bleeding profusely.

Next day we decided, as we had enjoyed the walk to Mannlichen so much, we would catch the cable car up and walk down to Wengen through one of the many valleys.

This is the view from the top of Mannlichen.



After walking down the same path the day before, we continued down the ridge in the bottom left side of the photo (the green bit).

The flowers were just as good as yesterday. I understand not everybody is in to flowers and plants so for those interested I have prepared a special blog following this one.

When I was walking past a family I heard the word 'Australian'. I turned and asked the father how he knew I was an

Australian. It turns out that he was talking to his son about the time they went to Australia and our "native bear" on Kangaroo Island did his business in front of the children. They did a trip in a camper van from Adelaide to Sydney around the coast and loved it. We had a nice chat on the way down as they told us quite a lot about the area (they were on their summer holidays from Bern) and what it was like living in the modern Switzerland.

Both parents spoke very good English, the children not so well. The oldest was very keen to know if we had been to the top of the Eureka building.

Our walk down off the higher ridge was very steep and took us a lot longer than anticipated. It was all worth it though as we walked down through raging brooks, cow meadows and tracks

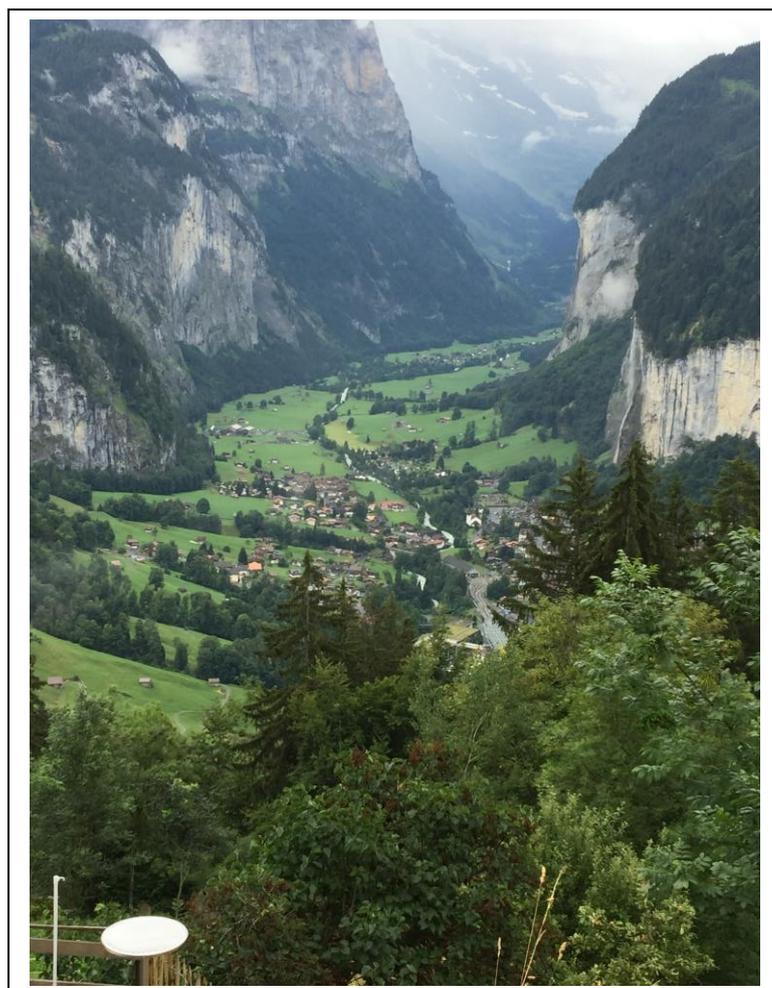
through forest. And of course, plenty of wildflowers. The area is spotted with old buildings throughout the ranges and this is an example of one.



Returning to our Hotel we came across this sled obviously in storage until needed for Xmas. We left our Xmas present wishes under the sled so let's hope Santa finds them.

On our final day in Wengen we decided to do some walking around close to the village and perhaps have a look in the shops. Carol was having trouble with her shoes, so we called into the local sports shop. The salesperson kept us entertained for over an hour as he first sold Carol some new shoes then wanted to sell me some as well. I have wide feet and it is always difficult to buy comfortable walking shoes. He had me try on a pair of boots that weighed about two kilograms each but were extremely comfortable. I was tempted but the thought of the extra weight in my shoes was too much, the search for the perfect walking shoe continues.

Wengen is essentially a car free village as there are no roads into the village from the valley floor. There are small cars which taxi people from the station to the hotels and a few vehicles for local commercial activities, so wherever you walk in and around the village there



are no cars. We walked to this spot three km's from the village

The train to Lake Geneva requires four changes, so we will keep our fingers crossed that they are all on time.

It is a view of the valley floor below Wengen, indicative of how much variance there is in the Bernese Alps. There is a Walking Trail along the valley floor which we will have to do next time. We returned back to our hotel and after four days there have been no murders so the Miss Marples have moved on only to be replaced by another group.

The hotel was a great place to stay, we even had our own table reserved for breakfast and dinner with a view of the snow.

Tomorrow we head off for the three lakes walking tour, starting at Lake Geneva walking up the Swiss Alps to Great St Bernard's pass and the lake at the pass then down again into the Aosta valley finishing our walk at Lake Viverone which is approximately 100