

## Season 15 – Part 4. Homerun through Switzerland



Fr 16.12.2016, day 523. (Spino - Silvaplana, 45 km)

When we came down to breakfast, we found a huge gift wrapped salami sausage on the table, surrounded by Swiss flags and with a little card attached. A former colleague and friend from the office had somehow found out at which hotel we were staying and had arranged this “Welcome to Switzerland!” surprise. We were both deeply touched! The landlady having learned of our adventures gave us a gift of a bottle of local chestnut liquor. It further turned out that she was the mother in law of a very famous Swiss ski star, Didier Cuche, who happened to be staying at the hotel as well. Soon he appeared together with his wife and their young baby and we had a very long chat (or actually I went into a long monologue until he said he would leave us so we could enjoy our breakfast... whoops!).

As we were about to leave, he asked us if we would mind if he took some pictures of us and post them on Facebook. He warned us that he had over 200'000 followers, so quite a few people would see the post. We were thrilled!

The bike ride up the Maloja pass was wonderful and we made it up with far less trouble than we had expected. We really are very fit after over 23'000 km on our bikes! We then biked along the lakes of the Engadin in brilliant sunshine arriving in Silvaplana in good time where we treated ourselves to a hotel, bought a pick-nick in the local Volg that we had in bed while watching Swiss television. Perfect!







Sa 17.12.2016, day 524. (Silvaplana - Chur, 82 km)

The sun had not yet risen up over the mountains when we headed off on our heavily packed bikes. It was bitterly cold, but we were soon sweating as the road steeply climbed up towards the Julier Pass at close to 2300 m altitude. Our feet, hands and face however remained bitterly cold. The scenery was beautiful, easily matching or even surpassing anything we had experienced in the Qilin Shan in China or the Pamirs.

We were happy to take refuge from the cold in a little refugio just after the pass, where we warmed up and dressed up in all the warm clothes we were carrying, in preparation for the icy cold decent down into the valley.

The ride to Chur took us a bit longer than expected, as the bike path had quite a few steep ascents as it wound its way down into valleys and then up again into the forests lining the valley slopes. But it was a beautiful ride.

We had arranged a Warmshower stay at Andrea and Willie's place in Chur. They were a wonderful couple, very generous and hospitable. They made a raclette for us and we had a wonderful evening talking about our adventures and listening to the stories they had to tell of their 7-month trip through Japan and Australia. Warmshowers working its magic once again...





Su 18.12.2016, day 525. (Chur - Weesen, 81 km)

Breakfast with Willie and Andrea was amazing. Homemade fresh Zopf with Swiss butter, homemade jams, Swiss cheese... How often had I dreamt of such a breakfast!

The bike ride from Chur towards Zurich was fantastic. To start with we biked on the Rhein bike path that leads all the way to Rotterdam in Holland, we soon left it though, heading towards the Walensee. Just after reaching the lake we stopped for a quick pick-nick on a bench enjoying the view out over the water and the mountains. The ride along the lake is very scenic with a bike path that is sometimes right down by the water's edge and sometimes climbs up over the cliffs above the lake. We had bought some sausages and bread thinking we could find some good place to make a fire and camp, however, the south side of the lake never sees the sun in winter. It is therefore very cold, dark and damp and the idea of camping quickly lost its attraction. We therefore decided to hedonistically check into a hotel. We found a cosy place to stay in Weesen, Hotel Flyhof, a tastefully renovated ancient farmhouse right on the edge of the lake.









Mo 19.12.2016, day 526. (Weesen - Thalwil, 69 km)

It had snowed during the night and the mountains around the lake were dusted with a light powdering of snow. We biked through Weesen and quickly found ourselves back on the bike path, biking over a thin layer of snow. We crossed the Linthtal, past perfectly green pastureland on perfectly paved secondary roads, through perfect villages where perfect families lived in perfect single family houses surrounded by perfect little gardens. It felt extremely Swiss. We stopped briefly in Lachen to have lunch in a shopping centre and then followed the lake direction Zurich. I soon started to recognize the road, as I had biked around Lake Zurich many times in the past. It somehow felt as if I had never left.

We got an extremely warm reception from Maribel and Marius in Thalwil, we were very touched. Maribel had decorated the place with balloons and a big "Welcome Home" poster and prepared the most amazing Peruvian soup for us. We had a wonderful party! We also got to know Chasky, an extremely lively and happy dog Maribel had saved from the streets of Lima.









Tu 20.12.2016, day 527. (Thalwil - Zurich, 20 km)

I had a bit of a hangover when I awoke on the spacious couch in the living room. I lay there with my eyes closed putting off getting up as long as possible. It was not long before I heard the patter of little paws approaching and then a cold wet snout sniffing all over my face. What a welcome to the day! No chance of staying in bed...

After a lovely long breakfast we biked the few kilometres in to Zurich arriving around lunch time. By coincidence I met a couple of my former colleagues from work at a pedestrian crossing. They were quite surprised to see us and for me it felt as if I had never been away. I asked them to join us for a beer or two in the evening and spread the word around the office.

We did a little tour of Zurich in the afternoon, I was amazed by all the new construction that has gone up since we left. Apart from that I had an eerie feeling that I had only just left.

We went for a couple of beers at the same bar, where we had our good-bye party 18 months ago. It was all very low key, which was perfect for us. Also, talking to my friends and colleagues, I felt as if I had only just left. One question however did stick in my head and is still there, floating around: "Was the trip just one long holiday, or was it a life-changing experience?". Right now, I have no idea. I think the next weeks and months will tell.







We 21.12.2016, day 528. (Zurich - Olten, 82 km)

We spent the night at Andrea and Tony's place, good friends of ours who live in a very artsy and stylish place. After a quick breakfast, we packed up all our stuff and carried it down to our bikes that we had parked up against a wall in the yard. There was a computer written note, hand signed and wrapped in a neat plastic folder on both our bikes, stating that our bikes were parked on a private car parking space and would be removed if we left them there. Yes! We were definitively back in Switzerland. The guy who wrote the notes appeared on the balcony just above us, telling us that the note was from him, probably expecting us to apologize. But I simply complemented him on how carefully he had written the note and thanked him for his efforts. We said good-bye to Andy and Tony who were off to work. Just after they had disappeared Siria noticed that she had left two of her bags up in the flat. It really is amazing we made it all the way only losing or forgetting minor things during all that time!

The bike ride towards Olten was very familiar, as I had biked most of the roads several times in the past. We thoroughly enjoyed the ride, slowly biking down the Limmat, mostly on small gravel roads with no traffic. In Baden we stopped in a very cosy little café to warm up our cold hands and feet. After Brugg the road follows the Aare, again mostly on bike lanes away from the main road. Along the way we got chatting to some passers-by, who were intrigued by the amount of luggage we were schlepping and wondered where we had come from.

In Olten we spent the evening with Didi and Mirjam, some more good friends of ours, who put on a wonderful feast of veal with truffle risotto for us, washed down with two bottles of wine.

Th 22.12.2016, day 529. (Olten - Basel, 40 km)

Mirjam and Didi had to leave for work very early in the morning, but they left us a key, so we had a good long sleep in.

It was bitterly cold and foggy in Olten when we left. We climbed up the Hauenstein Pass towards Basel marvelling at the thick layer of hoarfrost that covered everything. A very interesting character wearing a blue bowler hat and smoking a pipe stopped to have a chat with us, curious who would be out bicycle touring in the middle of winter. We blasted up the pass in no time and right after the top delved into brilliant sunshine. It was magic! Speeding down the other side of the pass towards the Rhine valley I noticed my bike vibrating. When we stopped to warm ourselves up, I noticed that the cheap 7\$ tire I had bought at the Bazar in Osh in Kyrgyzstan, and that had carried me all the way across the Pamir to Samarkand, through Azerbaijan and Georgia into Turkey and then from Albania through Monte Negro, up the Croatian coast and over the Swiss alps, had decided to give up a mere 20 km before the end of the trip. The inner tube was bulging out from a long tear in the tire along the rim of the wheel. Luckily I was still carrying an old tire that Romain and Emily had given to me in Dushanbe.

And so, we arrived in Basel, where we had said good-bye to our friends and families on July 13<sup>th</sup> 2015 and taken the train northwards up through Germany.

We checked into the backpacker Hostel, had a little pick-nick of bread, cheese and chocolate in the room and then headed off into the city for some sight-seeing. It's a funny feeling visiting your home town as a tourist! You get to see it in a whole new light.

Again, we had arranged to meet some friends of ours in a small bar, the Bibliothek Bar, down town and again it was a very low key event, which was absolutely perfect for me. It was wonderful seeing everyone again and I was particularly happy that even a former physics teacher of mine came along to say hello! He had been following our trip closely, interested in long distance bicycle touring ever since his son biked from Switzerland all the way to Nepal.



















Fr 23.12.2016, day 530. (Basel – Ettingen - Grellingen, 25 km)

The day before Christmas eve was the last bicycling day of the trip. I had another puncture in my back wheel but it was a slow one and I decided to simply stop and pump up the wheel from time to time as I really didn't feel like fixing another puncture!

For the last time we lugged all our stuff out of the room and down the stairs, for the last time I packed the guitar into the trailer and hitched the trailer to the bike before hooking on all the other panniers. This had been the routine almost every morning for the last 1.5 years!

We first biked to Siria's parents place in Ettingen. Just before we got there, a tall athletic guy, dressed completely in black and wearing a rather scary black mask called out to us. It was Siria's brother, a professional football player, who was out doing his gruelling training routine wearing his high altitude simulating mask. What a coincidence! I then got to see the new flat Siria's parents had moved into about one year ago for the first time. It was wonderful seeing Siria's Mum again and she was very happy to see the two of us back safe and sound. I somehow think she can neither quite imagine nor understand what we have been doing and how we have been living for the last 1.5 years.

I said goodbye to Siria and then biked a couple of kilometres over to the next village where, Ruppert, a very good friend of mine has his doctor's practice. Before we left on our trip he had given us a huge stock of all sorts of medicine, most of which we thankfully never had to use. He had also been our travel doctor quickly replying whenever we sent him some graphic description of some nasty little ailment we had picked up in some murky corner of the world.

I then headed off homewards to bike the very last few kilometres of this 530 day long 22'922 km bicycle ride to Grellingen to say hello once again to my wonderful parents for a nice cup of tea.



