

Travels to Switzerland (and a few other surrounding countries).

Week 1 . Sunday 26th June to Sunday 3rd July

Well here we are at last, on our long awaited travels over La Manche.

Well actually to be honest, it was tunnel sous La Manche, as we are still very much in COVID mode and we decided to take the Channel tunnel so we could remain in splendid isolation in our hermetically sealed van. We noticed we were almost the only ones still wearing masks.

Our destination is Bourg St Pierre, Switzerland where Wend has booked a trekking holiday called 'Secret Switzerland: Tours des Combins'.

We decided to meander to Switzerland via Alsace, finding places to stop along the way, knowing that in France they have lovely and plentiful places to park up for the night. The Aires mostly used to be free but noticeably now there is a small charge of around 9 euros for the larger ones, or a pay station for services, water, electric, discharge etc., in the small village ones.

So as to avoid any holdups we stayed overnight in Canterbury 'Park and Ride' before an uneventful trip 20 mins. down the road, to go through passport control and onto Le Train. Not surprisingly as it was the first time travelling abroad since Brexit, we were ultra cautious but it seems as long as you follow the guidelines especially with dogs, all should go smoothly, ours did! Basically all the form filling hassle of animal health certificates and evidence of COVID vaccines and passports was completed beforehand (by us to Passpets and the Eurotunnel booking service). In fact there were no hold ups at all either travelling or boarding the train. Surprisingly no- one asked if we had the forbidden meat or milk products which was a bit of a let down as we had ensured we had no stock containing either: they only wanted to know if we had turned off our gas!

For those who have not taken a vehicle on Le Train...you just go through French passport control this side, await your call to board, just drive on, sit for 35 mins, drive off and on your way without delay! (Clearly though, not at the start of the school holidays and probably best mid- week.)

So off into France we go towards Lille, Valenciennes and stopping overnight at a beautiful Aire just south of Mons called Val Joly, in a park by a lake.



The View from the van.

Tuesday, 28 th June

Heading towards the Rhine and Strasbourg today.

As we are not in a hurry, we took a lazy route through the villages along the Routes de Meuse. (There's a superb off-road cycle touring route along this river for those who have the inclination.) Stopping at Montherm for a break and a cafe au lait we popped in and out of Belgium en route along the Forest of the Ardennes. Belgium ...that little made up country from 1830 but which manages to have a king and Waterloo, (yes, it was in France when we beat Napoleon) Herge's Tin Tin museum, Poirot, Plastic Bertrand, (Kelloggs, 'we do breakfast' advert) as well as a very good national football team and not forgetting beer of course. Well, although we drove through Chimay home of beer, surprisingly we saw no hops ...so where do they come from? Last but not least as we are here, the Battle of the Bulge. Meaning different things to different people we know, but this one was on 16th December, 1944 when the Germans launched a last ditch, massive panzer attack on Allied forces in the area around the Ardennes forest during the Second World War. Robert Shaw played a not very nice German Commander and earned \$350,000 for his role in the film doing so. (more than he had earned in his entire career up to that point.....until of course...JAWS!) Sorry, we digress.

Ok, that's Belgium, back to France and the Alsace.

Next, getting very hot we sucked on our Opal Fruits (made to make your mouth water and yes we know they're now Starburst but they will always be Opal Fruits to those of us over 50!) we flowed along until of course we turned on our not so faithful friend, Gina Sat-Nav.

Well, we should know by now, she can do fastest, shortest, eco, but not 'sensible' route which meant we ended up on a very narrow logging lane which after a few miles had a very large sign saying "turn around ici" ...which we didn't as we'd come too far by then...so pretending we were an Amazon truck delivering to isolated cabins we carried on, squeezing pass a couple of work vans in our arduous descent back down the hill...back onto the road we were on originally ...of course. Eventually we were back on the motorway towards Metz having popped shortly into Luxembourg. (cheapest fuel but still £7 per gallon!)

We stayed the night at Pont -a -Mousson on the Moselle river enjoying a good walk for the dogs and a coffee and croissant in the local boulangerie before leaving.



Phin eyeing up the heron, now flying off

Wednesday, 29 th June

We continued on through the Alsace up over the hills to Orschwihr where we bought some lovely white wine, Pinot Gris and of course Alsace. There was also 'of course' the part that just had to be done, a bit of wine tasting before dinner.

Alsace is a very beautiful part of north eastern France on the western bank of the Upper Rhine bordering Switzerland and Germany. It has alternated between German and French control over centuries with Strasbourg as it's capital. We could have stayed in this region forever, it is just so interesting and very beautiful.



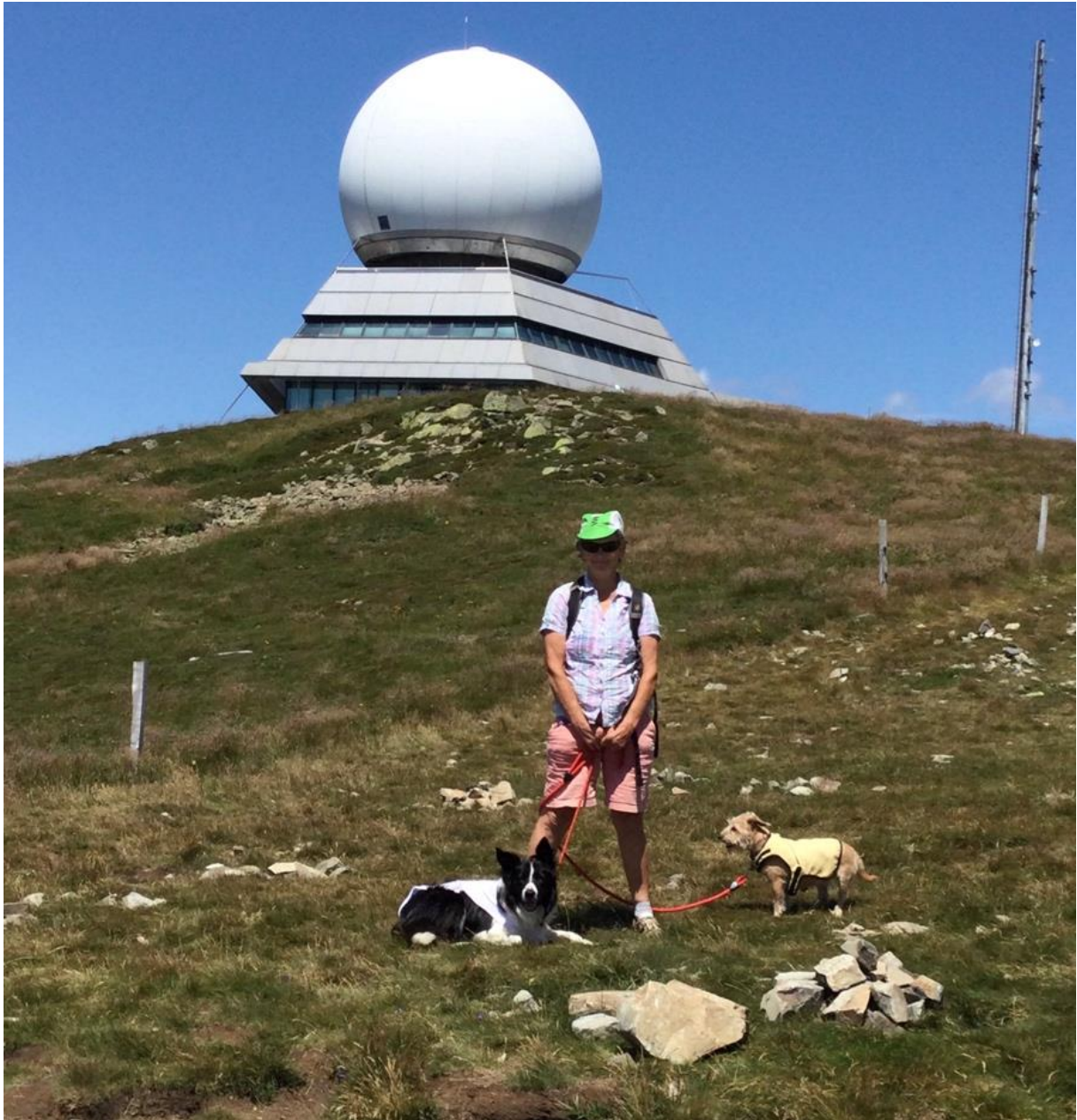
Typical Alsace.

We stayed the night in a tiny Aire in Orschwihr where we walked late afternoon through the vineyards for a couple of hours just enjoying the scenery. It was still hot enough to need the 'cool coats' on the dogs.

Thursday June 30th.

A lovely boucle (circular) walk in the woods before setting off for the top of the Vosges Mountains. Up, up and away to Le Grand Ballon.

A huge white ball which is an air traffic control radar station is located on the summit of the Grand Ballon or Great Belchen the highest mountain in the range. (But the ball has nothing to do with it's name).



The dogs by the ball with their 'cool' coats on.

Another beautiful day and another coffee with myrtle tart before setting off on the tour around the hill before walking down to the col through the beautiful meadows with butterflies just everywhere. .

The meadow butterflies, sorry it really doesn't do them justice.



The very best time of year to visit for this.



Wend finishing off the myrtle tart.

The day ended with a thunderstorm and torrential rain which at least cleared the air of the muggy heat.

Another stop in a village Aire at Chavannes sur l' Etang, which while a bit neglected did us well enough, even though the local lads came and played football in the undercover shelter to get out of the rain until just after 10.00pm !

Friday, July 1 st

Off into Switzerland and our arrival at our final destination Bourg St Pierre via E. Le Clerc (a large supermarket chain) for food to keep Lin supplied for the week while Wend goes on her walking tour. A bit of a stressful day as we couldn't find anywhere to stay for the night that we liked the look of en route. We were also trying to locate what turned out to be a non existent GPL gas source and a place to discharge and collect some water...along with a decent Aire, all rather scarce in this region it seemed. Added to this dear Gina Sat-Nav had earlier managed to take us through the centre of Basel.... and every village and town she could possibly go through. ..next time the motorway! Thus a word of warning ...never attempt to avoid the Swiss motorways and the 40 f Vignette (for the privilege of using them) thinking to use non motorway roads, as every village/town has more roundabouts, traffic lights, pinch points and zebra crossings than the whole of Europe put together! We eventually abandoned Gina Sat-Nav and decided the motorway was indeed the only way to travel across Switzerland. So next we cheerfully stopped to buy a Vignette only to discover the Swiss francs we had from our last trip here we're quite useless ! The Swiss it seems like to change their notes often, rendering the old ones quite worthless. It was now 7.30 pm and we'd had enough, so we decided just to get on and head for the campsite in the village at Bourg St Pierre itself and pay up the 48 francs per night for the privilege. We weren't too thrilled about this as we were likely to be there two or three nights. So, with the cost of the Vignette and a likely 3 nights in a Campsite, that was most of our 200 Swiss Francs we had brought with us for this first week ... but all now irrelevant of course as our Francs were quite useless anyway! (Hopefully we can take them into a bank and try to exchange them). Next, our first piece of luck today. We had decided to check out Wend's hotel where she was due to spend her first night with the Walking Group. Most fortuitously on entering the village there it was ' Bivouac Napoleon' and even better it had a nice big car park. Being the seasoned adventurers that we are, a pleasant word with the owner allowed us to park up there for a couple of nights. (Hence why we had bothered looking for services earlier as it then allowed for circumstances such as this where we may park but with no facilities). At last we could relax with a much needed pint and a most delicious meal in the hotel restaurant.(the usual courtesies for the allowed parking and we were seriously beyond wanting to cook at this stage.)

Saturday, 2 nd July

Off for a lovely 2 hrs walk to Liddes, a village down the valley taking in some more very beautiful meadows along the river and to get some proper Swiss Francs ! Very hot. We waited for the cool of the evening before ambling around Bourg St Pierre itself which is just a small village with very old wooden buildings dating back to 1600, including a house where Napoleon himself stayed in 1800 while loitering in the Alps on some campaign or other. (Hence presumably the name of the Hotel.)

Sunday, 3 rd July

Moving on day for Lin and later this evening, a meet-up for Wend with the rest of the walking group who had also individually had to make their own way here, probably by air, train and bus. Another lovely day. Wend went off for an early morning walk with Phin to get a preview of the first part of her route and to see what might lay in store for her. Coffee and croissants next and then off up the Grt St Bernard pass ready to go over the Alps into Italy. The Great St Bernard Pass is the third highest road pass in Switzerland, at an elevation of 2,469 m. it connects Martigny in Switzerland with the Aosta Valley in Italy.

Wend came up for the ride, again for a bit of a preview of her walking route and then caught the bus back down while she waited for the rest of her group to arrive at the 'Bivouac' (She will of course be on foot next time here !) Despite the scary road up it was very busy at the top as it was the weekend and full of day trippers. Avoiding the crowds we managed to meet some of the famous St Bernard dogs being exercised. They have a Museum and kennels here which are now run by a Trust which took over the care of the dogs from the Hospice.

The St Bernard dog breed was created here circa 1800' s, originally to provide guard dogs for the Hospice before they became mountain rescue dogs, rescuing wayward travellers mostly through scent. Wend will arrive here on Day 6 of her trek from the Italian side and then hike back down across the mountains and meadows back to Bourg St Pierre.



At the top, going towards Italy.

Next, Lin, Phin and Gracie took off over the pass into Italy to find a nice Aire or two to stay in for the week in the Aosta valley. A region famous for its cheese, it's also a popular tourist, area due to its location in northwest Italy, for France the Mont Blanc tunnel and Switzerland, the Grt St Bernard tunnel. Here in the Alps are the iconic snow capped peaks of the Matterhorn, Mont Blanc, Monte Rosa and Gran Paradiso, which Wend will be viewing (on a clear day) from the other side at Col de Champollion at 2700 mtrs before she comes down also into the Aosta valley (but a bit further along and a wee bit higher up).

Meanwhile Lin, Phin and Gracie went off to the end of the Cogne Aosta Valle to the Cascade di Lillaz, with the idea of working their way gradually back down and then up and back over the Pass to meet Wend at Bourg St Pierre. We shall see.



The Aire at Lillaz. Lin's first stop by the waterfalls.

Week 2. Monday, 4th July to Monday, 11 th July.

Well, this week's story is somewhat truncated.

Lin lounged around Lillaz and Cogne clambering around mountains and waterfalls while Wend's week was sort of similar roaming around the Combin with the odd glacier thrown in.



The walk up to the waterfall at La Valeille at Lillaz.



High above Cogne at a mountain village, Gillemans.

Meantime Wendy had taken a few photos too.



Ibex enjoying view.

The new bridge built to view the Glacier with one of the walking group testing it first.





The mountains and Glacier.



The point of the walkGrand Combin itself.

A full itinerary of this amazing trek can be checked out at <https://www.keadventure.com/holidays/switzerland-walking-gran-combin-circuit>.

On her return journey Wend lastly visited the Grt St Bernard Pass dog kennels and Museum before the final trek down and retells the story behind the St Bernard dogs...all a bit ghoulish.

Here's her précis.

Barry the 1st St...Bernard saved 40 people and lives on in a museum in Bern ...stuffed.

Barry the 2nd. Bit of a dud and not mentioned.

Barry the 3rd. Sired many pups. Sadly came to a fateful end whilst rescuing travellers when he tripped over his brandy keg and fell down a crevasse. Lives on in the Museum ...stuffed.

There was a morgue in the Hospice to put the bodies of those travellers the dogs didn't rescue alive but dragged back dead. These bodies were hung up like sides of bacon. Some joker, then played tricks pretending to be one... then coming alive scaring the tourists.

As a result the morgue was bricked up ...complete with hanging bodies (not sure about the joker...bricked in too probably). All a little while ago ... now they just breed pups approx. 25 a year.

Saturday, 9th July

As planned Lin, Phin and Gracie had driven back down the valley stopping at an Aire at Cogne and then today back up and across to Switzerland to meet Wendy back at Bourg St Pierre .

(Just in case anyone is wondering where her ladyship Lola is, she's holidaying with her Aunty Sue and Dog Mother back in England as at 15 yrs she has a bit of dementia and developed a phobia to travelling in the campervan just two weeks before we were due to go. In fact it is really just as well as she probably would not have survived the heat).

Wendy trekked down from the Grt St Bernard Pass on the last day of her journey back to the hotel.

Sunday, July 10th

Safely on to our next stage of the journey we managed to find the elusive GPL gas en route towards our new target of the Simplon Pass, ready to go another way into Italy. (Agatha Christie's 'Murder on the Orient Express' was actually filmed here on the Simplon Orient express, as was Grahame Greene's 'Stamboul Train').

Travelling along the Rhône river, we meandered through the Valais valley feasting on the local roadside apricots (the healthier alternative to the Opal fruits).

The Swiss canton of Valais has a reputation for producing delicious Swiss apricots, about 75 % of Switzerland's total, and grown mostly here on the south side of the river between Sierre and Vernayaz.



Just enjoying the scenery we went up to Crans -Montana, which is for golf fans, the Swiss stop on the Omega European Masters professional men's golf Tour. The price of a car park we found large enough to take campervans was 150 Swiss francs...so we didn't stop. While we couldn't quite work out what this covered we decided it must have been meant for those Golfers raking it in on the new rich Saudi golf tour. We had only gone up there for a coffee as we had read it was a scenic mountain route. (which was quite weird of us really as the whole of Switzerland is one big scenic mountain route.)

Sadly our next stop, a campsite in Grimentz in the Valle of Anniviers, had to be abandoned as the road up was closed ...our first "Route Barrée" or "Straße gesperrt". The language used depends roughly on where you are! Switzerland is divided into 26 different areas called cantons which are similar to our counties. Each canton has the ability to decide its own official languages. The particular languages spoken by each canton represents both the geographical and cultural boundaries of Switzerland and the influence of the countries closest to them.

The Valais canton is accepted as bi-lingual but is mostly German here, with roads signs reflecting this. (whereas in Bourg St Pierre for example, everything was in French).

Already described in our trusty 'Aires in the Mountains' book as ...' up a steep and winding road' (we do those) we found the diversion was a one hour long, steep, narrow, winding road which gradually became even more narrow (we don't do those, especially up mountains). We decided enough was enough and even Gina Sat -Nav who really doesn't cope well with diversions to her planned route, was telling us in her well modulated dulcet tones to "turn around where possible"... we wished!

Not helping, Wend had developed a bad cough and sore throat and so in the stultifying heat we decided to potter back down the mountain ...where we sheltered gratefully under a tree in a very pleasant campsite just yards from the Rhône river at Gampel, near Sierre.



Monday, 11th July

Next a day to relax, rest the patient and do a few chores, mostly shopping in Lidl and off to find a Bank to change those old useless notes. Lin scampered around Brig, a small town, to find three different banks that had ATMs but no people. Giving up trying to drive, park and scurry around town she parked(illegally) and waited in the van while Wend croaked her way past a sympathetic bank cashier in the fourth one. Having said ' we only serve our own customers' the poor woman took one look at Wend as she croaked out her request (and looking likely to pass out any minute) ... and quickly changed the notes.

Our next stop, a lovely campsite complete with a restaurant, was again right on the river Rhône at Tunetsch where we will stay for a couple of nights.

Tomorrow we're off to the village to ride the cable car up to see the Aletsch glacier, the largest glacier in the Alps. The ice extends from the northern slopes of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau down towards us here at Valais. But that's another adventure for next time.

Week 3. Tuesday 12th July to Monday 18th July.

Tuesday, 12 th July

So to the next adventure! One of the reasons we stayed just outside of Brig was to see the Aletsch glacier, the largest and longest in the Alps. So off we set for our 10 mins walk to the cable car in the nearby village of Mörel which would take us up into the mountains to the glacier. Now, when I say our hearts dropped at the next bit, some of you may just understand what we mean without taking offence, but we arrived at the cable car station just at the same time as a coach disgorging Japanese tourists. (Images of our last visit here at Interlaken immediately sprung to mind...there were two train carriages full, everywhere we went!) Well fortunately for us, this time we were accompanied by our dogs and for some reason Japanese tourists seem not to be overly fond of our four legged friends...which meant they tended to keep their distance. So at least one Japanese -free cable car ride later we were at the top at Moosfluh where we could enjoy and wonder at... The Glacier. (unlike the Japanese in the car behind us, who on reaching the top rushed out and took their photos and rushed back in the cable car.)



It is absolutely amazing!
Lin and the dogs by the Aletsch Glacier.



...with Wendy too.

We wandered around to enjoy the spectacular views of the glacier before walking 4 miles back down to a middle station at Riederalp and catching the cable car back to the village. Wend was now beginning to really feel a bit rough and while we smiled at our oriental travellers we were later very glad that they and us were (albeit the only ones) fully masked. It seems that happy memories and photos were not all Wend had brought back from her trek. Wend took a covid test and not too surprisingly was positive.

Wednesday, 13 th July

Fortunately we had remained fairly remote in the camper van and wore our masks if shopping or anywhere there were crowds. On looking back most other points of contact such as the bank and campsite reception were all behind plexiglass screens too.

So feeling we hadn't overly increased covid numbers, (if at all compared to anyone else) today we decided to just have a long day travelling in splendid isolation in the van and head up and over the Simplon pass towards our next stop, Lake Maggiore.

The Simplon Pass is another high mountain pass between Switzerland and Italy and which connects Brig in the canton of Valais with Domodossola in Piedmont, Italy (although the villages both sides are actually in Switzerland with the Italian border about 5 miles further on). The Simplon tunnel is rail only and was built in the early 20 century to carry rail traffic between the two countries...including of course the Orient Express.

After a pleasant, scenic drive up we stopped at the top to let the dogs out, have a coffee, get a bit of fresh air and where we also spied another huge Hospice. Utilized as a travellers lodge (as the one at Grt St Bernard's Pass), Napoleon Bonaparte ordered one built here in 1801 also for travellers and later used as a barracks. Today it is run by the "Canons of St. Bernard" and still offers respite to around 130 guests. The old one was swept away in an avalanche, and this new one offers a lodge, retreats, school camps and educational courses. (By way of another complete aside...Wend retold

that she had heard from a former Bernard village priest, that Father Frederic previous chief of the hospice at Grt St Bernard pass, was now here at the hospice at the Simplon Pass... having been moved on ...as is the want of the Catholic Church to deal with its ' miscreant ' priests. Say no more , but at the time apparently the talk of the village...interesting what you learn when you chat to fellow walkers along the way!)



Remembering Granny.

The reason we are off to Lake Maggiore is because Wend was reminiscing about her postcard from Granny, sent from there in the early 1960's. (and no doubt whom she got the family travel bug from.)

Lake Maggiore is a large lake located on the south side of the Alps and is the second largest lake in Italy and the largest in Switzerland being about 40 miles long . We cheerfully followed its shores for about 25 miles from Verbania to just outside of Locarno on the Swiss side. Wendy's a little vague as to exactly where Granny resided, but we've pitched up at Tenero at the only campsite that allowed dogs and which actually had a dog beach, all for the princely sum of 125 Swiss francs a night. (We've gone from free Aires, to 9 , 15, 33 euros, 48 and now 125 Swiss francs per night, campsites.) To be honest our main concern was just hoping they had a vacancy as everything was looking terribly touristy and busy. Once settled, it was worth every cent just to get the dogs and us in the water after a long, hot, day travelling . Not too surprisingly, after a first negative test , Lin too has COVID so we parked up and grabbed our bathers and headed the 100 mtrs to the shore of the lake. Sweet relief for all, as the temperature even in this lowest part of Switzerland was showing nearly 40 deg.



Thursday, 14th July

There was absolutely no way we wanted to move on, but could or wanted to stay in this busy, very hot campsite for the day so we decided to walk the 2 miles along Lake Maggiore into Locarno. Once there we again headed for the mountains as the coolest location. So donning our masks we happily trundled up the mountain, first in the historic funicular, to quote " the most comfortable and



romantic option to visit the Sacro Monte Madonna del Sasso and the starting point for mesmerising excursions into the hilly mountains of Locarno"! ...(yes, the little blue job in photo).

Next we continued in a small gondola cable car (with dogs we have these to ourselves), to Cardada. We did desist the chair lift to the very top to go to Cimetta as we thought the dogs might not do the leg swinging bit too well and Gracie couldn't reach the grab bar! (Rather hilariously the staff at the campsite had previously demonstrated how the dogs would be fine on this chair lift). So we walked up, but not quite making it all the way to the top, we stopped for a late lunch. To complete the day and to keep us in the fresh air, we took the 2 francs boat back across the lake to the campsite.



Interestingly while we keep well masked, sanitised and stood well back as possible, there were no covid precautions by anyone else except the odd person wearing a mask. Life seemed just as normal and we were told masks weren't mandatory now by one of the receptionist staff. Clearly we decided they are a must for us as we have little choice but to get out, unless we fancied suffocating in the van for a week.

Friday, 15th July

Having probably over exerted ourselves the day before and both feeling pretty horrid, we again, as on Wednesday, decided the best course of action was to isolate in the van by travelling a long day from Lake Maggiore to Bolsana, Italy. We took the easiest, safest and most mindless route, the motorway via Milan rather than the planned more scenic route in the mountains via Lake Como, Sondrio etc , which was a bit of a shame but needs and safety first.

Ciao The Dolomites!

We arrived at a campsite high up in Dolomites about 12 miles further on from Bolzano at Seiser Alm. Fortunately, given our circumstances the campsite was full! We were actually even more pleased when we watched the caravan in front of us being towed in by the camp tractor. That sort of placement is always a bit scary !



As we had dogs we were shown a nice corner spot on the Stellplatz (Motorhome overnight park) attached to the site and overlooking the valley.

Saturday, 16th July

Both still feeling the effects of covid and despite the altitude, it was still very hot, so we decided to have a fairly restful day with just a short walk of a couple of miles up to some lakes, read and rest.



Phin is in the lake!

Well, as the day drew to a close and still amidst the sweltering heat we had the most marvellous thunderstorm. It then rained solid for over an hour and cleared the air. Although the Stellplatz had a good, nightly turnover, we sat huddled in our corner for a couple of days keeping ourselves to ourselves.



The sun setting on the Dolomites above the Stellplatz.

Sunday, 17 th July

We woke up to another hot day, although we were rather hoping it might have been a little cooler after the thunderstorm. Now to plan what best to do. Both feeling under the weather do we stay in ...or go out? Well, deciding the dogs always need walking whatever (they get taken for a series of short walks to relieve the copious amounts of water they drink) we decided getting out was the healthier option. Avoiding the bus (we are variously offered free bus passes by the campsites) we walked a couple of miles to the cable car at Seis Am Schleren to go up to Compaccio.(1850 mtrs). and another up to Bullaccia (2174 mtrs). We had no problems getting one of the continuously arriving, gondola cable cars to ourselves fortunately.



The dogs have to wear 'masks' too on public transport!



One of our coffee stops at Compaccio.

Monday, 18th July

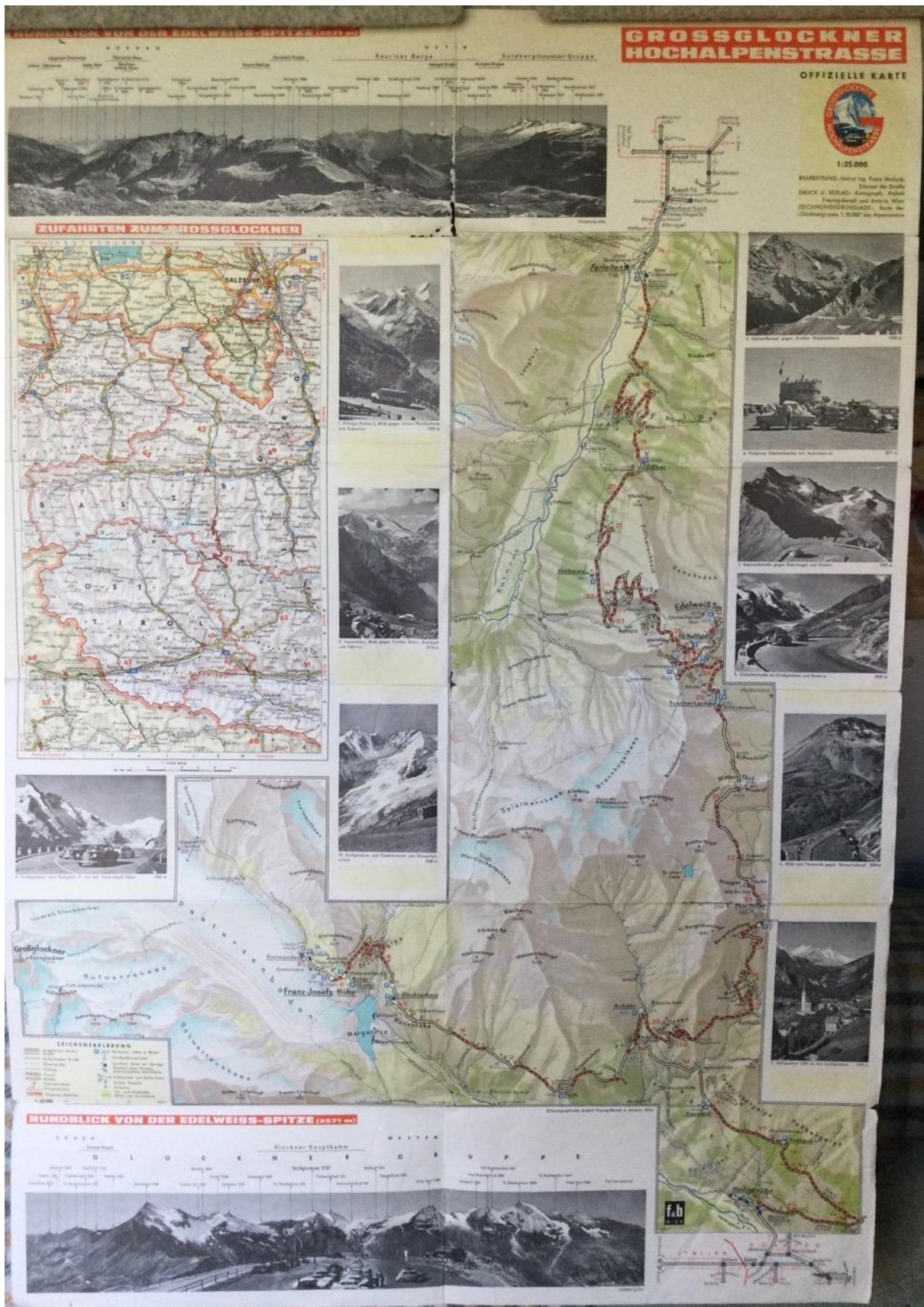
Having got a little over zealous about what we could manage yesterday, having felt quite fit (comparatively) plus thinking we were probably over the top, we found ourselves yet again tired and with sore throats. We therefore, but not too reluctantly, decided to abandon our plans to stay longer in the Dolomites as it was all very busy! Not only in England, but the whole of Europe (where it has always been more popular) has bought a campervan and taken to the roads. We're not sure that any Germans could have been left in Germany. (while also many Dutch ... but not another English number plate to be seen). So on we trundled into Austria to get ready for our next planned adventure...the Gross Glockner Pass and to rest up in a delightful small Stellplatz up at Obertilliach which we had thankfully found.

Week 4 . 19 th July to 27th July

Tuesday, 19th July

We arrived in the small Stellplatz up at Obertilliach at a small ski centre and our last stop before our next goal, the GrossGlockner pass. Known as the Grosslockner High Alpine road (in German Großglockner Hochalpenstraße) it is the highest surfaced mountain pass in Austria. It is a toll road and has a branch-off to Fuscher Törl and the Edelweißspitze viewpoint (2,571 m). The road is named after Austria's highest mountain and is rather bizarrely one of Austria's main tourist attractions. The reason we are here is another Palmer travel story. In 1966 the Palmer family set off in two Cortina's to go to Europe, to what was then the old Yugoslavia to be exact. The route was planned and maps purchased, but then Dad, son of Maggiore granny thought that with four adults and accompanying luggage in his Cortina...perhaps not...maybe the tunnel...which they did. Now 56 years later the said purchased map was discovered amongst Dad's belongings and thus the trip was brought to life again by daughter of son of Maggiore granny.

Dads 1966 map of the GrossGlockner Pass.



Lin's not looking, she's driving.

Wednesday, 20 th July.

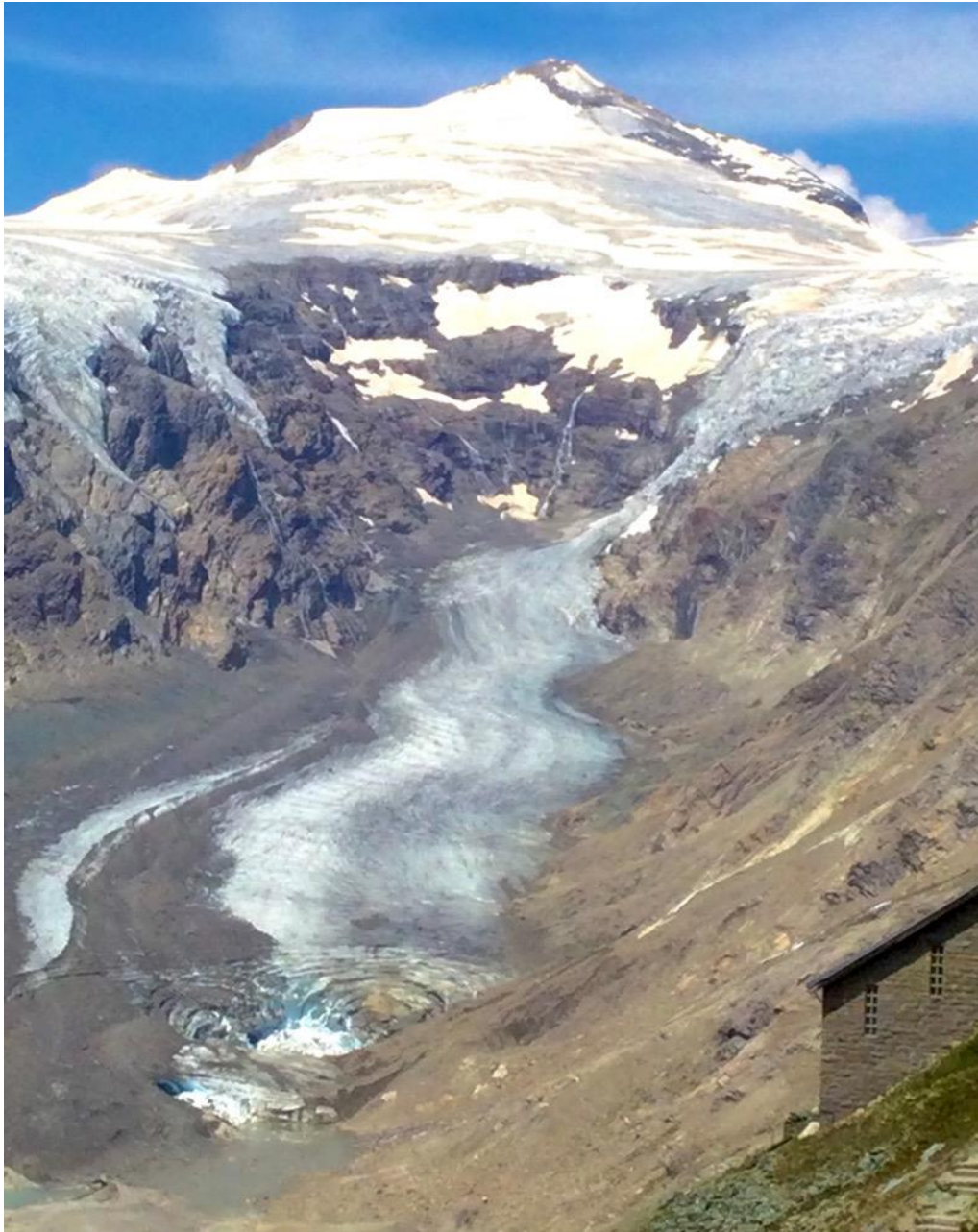
England are playing Spain in the women 's Euro football tonight.

Hope we can get a signal the other side of that Pass.

Hope we're alive to get a signal the other side of that Pass.

Up, up we go to the top.

Here we are and we can go no further as the road ends here at the branch- off viewpoint.



The GrossGlockner .

A super place to stop and have coffee and cake.

Well, we walked around, pondered a bit, took photos and had our break...with the many others who had come up in coaches, hundreds of motorbikes and even The Lambretta club had arrived.

It was indeed a very popular tourist spot.

It had been a long, long way up , so now for the long, long way down, starting from the top of the branch off .

It really didn't help much when there were continuous signs saying "change to a low gear", "are your brakes ok ?"(in 3 languages). Well yes, they were a bit smelly at the bottom but we had given them a couple of rests while we viewed the stunning scenery.

Phew, finally down through the 20 + hairpin bends which were conveniently numbered to let you know you were coming to the end.



The start of the downward journey.

We travelled on to our next stop a small private Stellplatz at Altenmark.

Oh heck, a sign up saying they were full, which was really yukky as finding another one at this time of the evening where they are few and far between was a bit daunting. Not to be deterred Lin knocked on the Reception door, smiled sweetly and asked if they could fit us in, and thankfully they squeezed us in for the night.

Thankfully we were able to watch the football, but which then found Lin wandering around in the woods at 11.30 pm walking the dogs (we're an hour ahead). She couldn't bear to watch the last 10 mins of extra time, much too tortuous....more so than driving down from the gorge.

Thursday, 21 st. July

There are lots of great places to visit in this part of Austria, (Berchtesgaden, Hitler's Eagle's nest retreat and Salzburg 'the hills are alive with' ...to name a couple) but we had visited many before on a previous trip, so they we're not on our agenda this time. Instead we decided to visit the Liechtensteinklamm Gorge which is a particularly narrow gorge with walls up to 300m high, located in the Austrian Alps 50 km south of Salzburg and near our destination. It is around 4 km long and named after Johann II of Liechtenstein who had the walkways installed in 1875.

Well we got as far as car park 4 when we decided to give it a miss as far too crowded. We've seen enough gorges not to want to inflict, tramping narrow walkways with hundreds of German and Dutch tourists, upon ourselves.

There can be no Dutch left in Holland and no Germans left in Germany, seem like the Brits are the only ones having trouble (Br)exiting on their hols, judging by the chaos around Dover.

Next, the visit to old friends in Muhlbach am Hochkonig, a small mountain ski resort near Bischofshofen. It was good to see them again and making such a success of their new life . They had moved here 6 years ago having given up their jobs as teachers after 20 years and embarking on a complete 'lifestyle change'.



Photo. Simon and Karlaine, previous neighbours of ours. It is quite usual to see the family name or trade, written on the houses, especially in more rural areas (also makes places easy to find, thank goodness). Haus literally meaning house.

We were due to go to Oberammergau, a beautiful Bavarian village known for it's Passion Play and due to take place this year between May and October. However, we had overstayed a bit at Haus

Gilbert and it did feel a wee bit ambitious of us, given its once - a- decade performance, just to pop in and even attempt an appearance ourselves. So we have decided to re- route and take a more direct return route home. This meant finding somewhere different to stay but after a few false trails we stayed at a Stellplatz next to a water ski resort just off-the-motorway at Kiefersfelden, Germany.



Photo of Neubeuern . A beautiful Bavarian village with portals in and out of the centre, which we mistakenly managed to go through, looking for a non existent overnight stop.

Friday , 22 nd July .

Having decided to re-route we started making more direct tracks towards France where there are Aires a' plenty and we can almost speak the language and almost understand what's said in reply, both very useful for our telephone call to make a vets appointment.

We were originally going to Piesport in Germany but changed from our planned Rhine/Mosel route as friends had e -mailed to say they were there very recently and everything was very busy. So bang goes our few cases of the locally grown wine we were hoping to buy, which we had sampled before on a previous trip.

So ...we took a very long but scenic drive in tandem with the River Inn to Innsbruck between miles and miles of the highest mountains. How any planes ever fly in and out of Innsbruck (technology aside) is a mystery. In fact older readers may remember that sadly a British flight crashed into a mountain in the 60s.

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_Eagle_International_Airlines_Flight_802/6

The last time we flew into Salzburg was quite scary and was during a thunderstorm. Having attempted unsuccessfully three times to land our plane finally landed at Linz just before the airport was closed and where we sat on the runway for 90 mins before the doors could be opened due to high winds.

Well, add the likelihood of COVID to flying and Wend is well 'off' flying anywhere, so that's why we drove to Switzerland and are now are driving through this most beautiful country, but in the busiest time of the tourist season.

We have now gone from going over mountains to burrowing through them. We reckon we must have travelled through at least ten miles of tunnels on our way up to Lake Constance (Konstanz known as Bodensee in German) which is a 63km-long central European lake that borders Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Why, we're not quite sure, as every where near water is very busy but as we had already re-routed we decided to keep going until we found somewhere to stop over. We have an agreement that if one of us doesn't 'like the look of ' a stopover we move on (but we have no inclination whatsoever to include Gina Satnav in these conversations) and so along we trundled. Gina Satnav got very fed up with us continually changing destinations and having to re-plan her routes as well as having to compete to be heard above Runrig belting out Loch Lomond (dance mix). At one stage she stopped talking to us altogether.

(Lin swears though, she later heard her humming along to Simon and Garfunkel.) We thought we'd put on some music to jolly ourselves along which was also very apt as our next stop at Singen had a music festival and where the intended Stellplatz was cordoned off, as well as traffic jams of music fans.

We hopped along the borders of Germany, Switzerland and Austria making Lin completely confused about where she was now spending those last Swiss francs. (not going to be left with those again in a hurry.) Such is life ...thank goodness for air conditioning, so we continued to trundle along just enjoying the scenery and architecture of the villages until the next stop.



Photo . One of the amazing village church spires.

We eventually pitched up at Bad Durrheim at a multi Stellplatz which had thermal baths...not quite our scene and having arrived latish, we left earlyish, unbathed. The weather is still stifling. Onwards towards Strasbourg, Home of the European Parliament and Courts of Human Rights but sadly no longer the home of our lovely park Aire which had closed. So no Strasbourg for us, except driving through it on our way up to Metz and beyond, going in and out of France and Luxembourg as we journeyed.

Saturday 23 July

Delight of delights, we had arrived at Rodemack, noted by some as one of the most beautiful villages in France. Rodemack is a small village to the north of Metz in the Moselle department (Lorraine region) close to the border with Luxembourg and Germany in northern France. It is often referred to as 'the little Carcassonne of Lorraine' because of the extensive fortified walls that still surround the historic part of Rodemack.

Here we drove over cobbles, through medieval buildings and exiting through yet another portal.



Photo. The Sierck fortified portal exiting the village. Gracie and Phin thinking “did we really drive through that?”



Photo of the medieval garden.

An interesting selection of plants laid out in quarters, as in Medieval times and including various herbal remedies for different parts of the body.

All well worth a visit and where we stayed for a couple of nights in a large spacious Aire on the hillside above the village, while we planned our last few days.

Monday 24 th July

Next we needed to ensure the dogs saw a vet within 5 days of reaching Blighty so we headed towards Arques where we had noted there were at least 3 listed. After making a fairly intelligible telephone call to one, we secured an appointment for tomorrow. So happy in the knowledge we had achieved this last bit that needed sorting, we found an Aire in nearby Watten next to the canal. Watten has two rivers and a busy commercial canal which is part of a large unified system that comes up from Dunkirk.

One of the huge barges using the canal in front of our Aire.



The village is famous for its old ruined abbey, and for its mill, which was restored in the 1990s. These two buildings are located on the "Mountain of Watten" (really just a hill approx. 200 ft at most) just outside the village which also has a large church dating from the thirteenth century.

It is also known for its archery, which we must admit to having some trouble working out. Fortunately the Archers' House of Watten displays an exhibition dedicated to this vertical pole archery, a typical activity of Flanders and Artois...apparently. The object is to knock down, with bow and arrows, small cylinders decorated with tricolour feathers, known as "birds", from the top cross-piece of a vertical mast, about thirty meters up in the air. (100 ft approx) . We did notice that the judges hut and other vulnerable bits were covered in wire mesh for protection. All in all a good and interesting place to stay both next to the canal and centre and in walking distance of most places of interest.



Tuesday 26 th July

The visit to the vets went off fine except that Gracie weighed in at a hefty 8 kilos. Now all we have to do is to find somewhere we can get a t.v. signal so we can watch England play Sweden in the Euro football semi finals.

England 4 Sweden 0 !

On that happy note we will say " bonne nuit".

See you at Wembley .

Wednesday 27 th July

Tragedy this morning as Lin, on sending the latest report, manages to lose the lot...gone...wiped off...a weeks blogging...kaput! Wend is extremely cool. Lin is not quite so cool.

So off to the coast to Gravelines ready for the Chunnel tomorrow and somewhere for Lin to sit and try to remember where we'd been

Gravelines where we can see La Manche and home.



“Au revoir”