

Tuesday September 8 Home to London Kings Cross Inn

The Times vouchers eventually arrived, and took them down to Valery, and had a cup of tea with Audrey. After the final checks, I left to catch the 1:55 bus to Amersham. The Met was not running properly but eventually a train left ten minutes late from platform two, and stopped at Harrow on the Hill, but there was a cross platform connection to Kings Cross.

I was checked to the Kings Cross Inn (£147 with debit card, no breakfast, wifi, luggage keeping etc all extra) in a reasonable but small room. A cup of tea, and then out to do a little shopping, and supper at Diwana where there was BT internet available. Not bad food, but not so good as I remember from the old days.

Back to the hotel for The Archers on the TV and a cup of hot chocolate.

Wednesday 9 London to Tübingen Hotel Alte Krone

The usual headaches, but the sinus remedy seems to help until 3.30, and then it's a bit of snoozing and podcasts and up a little before five. The alarm is not needed! After a shower, I'm soon ready to go and leave the hotel soon after 5.30 for the short walk across the road. WHS is just opening for my Times and the last of the Cook's Telegraphs, which comes with a welcome, and free, bottle of water. Le Pain Quotidian is only open for takeaway, and so I check I and have a cup of coffee and an Almond Croissant in the departure lounge.

Boarding and departure are smooth and on time (7.01), and the train is busy but not quite full. There are no stops and I am pleased that there are no signs of illegal immigrants at Fréthun. We arrive in Paris about two minutes late, and so there is plenty of time for the level longer walk to the Gare de l'Est. I don't see any luggage lockers at Nord, but see a sign at Est (for return). The Est station has been evacuated, with no explanation, but we are soon let in and wifi is available until the train arrives and departed on time. Again busy but not full. My seat is upstairs, and I can spread out after Strasbourg. I had had an email warning that the journey would be twenty minutes longer, and in fact we are 30 mins late into Stuttgart; the engineering work is east of Kehl. There is a local train in twenty minutes and I am in Tübingen just before five.

I elect to walk to the hotel in the afternoon sun, although there are buses, and it takes about 45 minutes. They are expecting me and soon after arriving I am established in the small single room which is perfectly adequate for the 73€ per night.

After a rest, laundry and a shower I have supper in the hotel with a pork steak with spaetzle and a Weissbier.

The night is very mixed with a wakeful spell about 1.30.

Thursday 10 Tübingen Hotel Alte Krone

I eventually get up at seven and after a shame go down for breakfast which is standard German with nothing special.

I am out by 9 o'clock to a beautiful sunny morning with hardly a cloud in the sky. It is quite cool but gets warmer as the day progresses. From the hotel I take various paths to the summit of the Osterberg but the views that I hoped for or largely missing because of the trees and houses. I am at walk down through the meadows which have lots of autumn crocuses growing in them to the old town. The bridge over the river is being refurbished so is only available to pedestrians and bicycles. I get stamps at the post office before walking along the path down the side of the river Neckar. I am walking into quite a brisk wind all tone of the song is still warm and there are lots of cyclists around.

As I approach Kirchentellinsfurth I cross the river by the main road bridge and then head up though the forest, partly on a minor road and partly on a path to the open area of Einsiedel. Here I am disappointed to find no impressive castle and no restaurant, but there are good views. I gradually make my way down through the woods, finding another closed eating spot, before getting back to the hotel at 4.30.

After a rest and a shower it is back to the dining room for a Schnitzel and glass of wine. After this a walk around and back to the room for the Archers and podcasts.

Wakeful around midnight this time.

Friday 11 Tübingen Hotel Alte Krone

Up at 6.30, shower and breakfast at seven. It's another beautiful morning, but cold enough to have the heating on.

Soon after eight I explore Lustnau, including the church but this is under a lot of scaffolding. A feature of the area seems to be the many pumps and horse troughs. Eventually it is time to go to Lustnau station for the hourly train to Reutlingen. Buying the ticket is tricky; the only machine is on the other platform which means using the road bridge over the line. The dirty screen is facing into the sun and is virtually unreadable. Eventually I have my ticket (3.30€) just in time for the train.

Reutlingen is bright and chilly and pleasant to walk around. It's a pleasant enough town, like many others in Germany. The main attraction seems to be the world's narrowest street; 31cm. My walk is up to the 707m high Achalm with its ruined tower, starting along Burgstrasse. First I get a slice of Zwiebelkuchen from the bakers. The road gets steeper, and changes to a footpath with lots of steps, and eventually leaves the woods to achieve the views. There is a big new hotel which seems out of place. The path is well surfaced and climbs steadily circling the peak.

After it is down to Eningen where most of the restaurants are closed but I find an Italian place where I am the only customer. I enjoy a tomato salad and tagliatelle with a mushroom and tomato sauce and a glass of Weizenbier. It's pleasant sitting in the sun and watching the small number of people going about their business.

Then it is back to the walk, through the streets around the bottom of the Achalm, where there is a lot of building work, with many old and new luxury houses; the bankers of Stuttgart? The Panorama Strasse no longer has its views as it follows the old railway line around the town centre to the Reutlingen Hauptbahnhof. I'm in good time for the 4.29 train back to Lustnau, and the ticket machine is far better.

Saturday 12 Tübingen Hotel Alte Krone

I had a rather better night and didn't get up till seven for breakfast at 7.30. After the usual, I was out soon after 8.30. It is another bright morning, and not so cold. I have decided to start the Amoxicillin.

I try out the cycle route for tomorrow and then head up out of town from the old Botanical Gardens. It's a good route alongside a stream to a suburb on the hill. Along the way there is a monument to the geographical centre of Baden Wurtemberg. From the top there is wonderful path through the woods with views to the south from time to time, with lots of orchards. It really is a delight. Just before midday I arrive at Grafenberg where the Schloss has a restaurant in the courtyard overlooking the plains to the south. It's a suitable place to have a lunch of Maultaschen and salad with a Weizenbier.

The afternoon progresses well with rather more cloud developing as I approach Herrenberg via cycle path down the hill from the Waldfriedhof. It's the last day of the closure of the Ammertal Bahn for renewing the signalling. The bus is comfortable to Tübingen, but I get the wrong onward train which doesn't stop at Lustnau, and so I have a longer walk back to the hotel.

Sunday 13 Tübingen Hotel Alte Krone to Pontresina Hotel Bernina

After a poor night I am up and showers in time for breakfast at 7.30. There is a school group and so I have mine near to the bar. I finish packing and leave just before nine to a cloudy but warm morning for my walk to the station which takes about 40 minutes and so I am in good time for the 1005 to Horb.

I am somewhat concerned about the 5 minute connection but several people are making it and there is no problem. The train is a Swiss Intercity train with plenty of room and it is a comfortable and scenic ride to Zürich, where there is forty minutes before the train to Chur. I talk to a group from GRJ who are returning from an Italian trip. The train is an old one, an 'ersatzzug' after some sort of accident, but we get to Chur on time and the journey to Pontresina is very familiar, though with lots of clouds and a few spots. Preda is a big construction site for the new tunnel.

We arrive at P about five minute late, and my lift is waiting for the short journey to the hotel, where there are familiar faces and I have the same room as last year, with the important bathtub. (Room 50)

By 6.30 I am bathed and in the Dining Room for my soup, Gnocchi, salad, Geschnetzeltes and ice cream with a glass of Veltliner. A short walk in the gathering gloom and back to the room.

Monday 14 Pontresina Hotel Bernina

Not too bad a night but with several awakenings. Bath and breakfast, just the same as last year.

Plenty of rain, and so I spend a leisurely morning reading and watching the world go by. Eventually the rain gets more intermittent, and I get the midday train to Ospizio, and walk along the lake and down to Alp Grüm. There is some brightness, but also heavy windy showers, with some hail. The timing works well and I have just ten minutes to wait for the train back, to St Moritz. The lakeside entrance to the station is quite different with the small hotel having disappeared. The walk through the Stazerwald seems quite traditional, but a slight extension. The weather is better with plenty of sun, but a little rain.

I get back by five, for a welcome bath and rest before supper at 6.30: curry soup, chicken tart, salad, char, caramel. General email, and face time to Derek.

Tuesday 15 Pontresina Hotel Bernina

Poor night (second at 1800m?). Breakfast, bath etc.

Bus at 9.18 to Sur Lej, Corvatsch Bahn (free!), and return to the half way station. The weather is fine with plenty of clouds floating around the mountains. At the top the temperature is about 4° and windy. At the half way station there is a building site for a new ski lift.

This year the path to the Fuorcla Surlej is open and it is a pleasure to make the gentle walk to the pass with some sun and lots of wind, and views improving all the time. At the pass, the restaurant is open but with few tables outside. The view across the tarn is good, but with clouds on top of the mountains. The clouds gradually clear but the wind persists all day. I start down the path in the direction of the Coaz Hütte but soon realise that there isn't enough time (and energy), and the path is diverted anyway. The path down to the valley is very rocky and rough, and I'm glad that I have a stick. The views just keep getting better, with lots of sun.

At the bottom I turn left and make my way gently down the Val Roseg with increasing tiredness. I take the paths not available in winter, and arrive at Surovas for the short walk to the hotel, arriving at five, tired, but having had an excellent day.

Bath and rest and supper (Bündner Platte, soup, salad, veal escalope and ice cream, with a quarter of Veltliner). Derek calls to confirm that he and Martin will join John and me on Christmas Day. Bed at nine, for a better night.

Wednesday 16 Pontresina Hotel Bernina

Up to more rain, and the prospect of a day of it. I get the 8.47 bus to St Moritz with connections to Soglio. It's quiet, and wet. The ride is as good as ever. Soglio has shops and restaurants open but few visitors. I head up the panoramic path with the possibility of going as Vicosoprano. It's very wet, with a lot of cobbles

and slabs. The first river coming down the hillside is a raging torrent and I don't fancy crossing it and so turn back. The rain continues and there are no views. I spend some time in the church, and eventually resort to the bus which the driver lets me into twenty minutes before departure time.

Rain all the way back to Pontresina, changing at Promotogno and Silvaplana. I get back about 3.30 for time in the room and a little shopping at the Co-op. Dinner is as good as ever, with melon cocktail and port, minestrone, salad, trout and ice cream, and is followed by a poor night.

Thursday 17

It's a bright morning, and soon after breakfast I set out walking up the valley from Surovas, and very pleasant it is in the dappled sunshine with good views. I take that fork to the right, looking down on the station at Morterasch. The waterfall near by is very full as are all the rivers after the heavy rain and melting glaciers. I make my way above and along the moraine as the clouds come in, as per the weather forecast. As I get to the the scramble below the Boval Hütte the hail starts with a high wind, followed by heavy rain, lightning and thunder. And so I turn around and make my way back getting wet.

Back at the hotel it is good to get out of my outside clothes and have a hot bath. Dinner again is good.

Friday 18

The night was much better, and eventually I get out of bed at seven. The town is wreathed in fog.

After breakfast I am out at about nine. The clouds are gradually clearing and the weather turns out to be excellent with almost continuous sun and a pleasant cool breeze. Walking down the valley there are plenty of good views with the sun and swirling mist. At Punt Muragl the timetable has changed, and the funicular leaves at 10.15.

At the top the views are excellent, with lots of people around. The route is familiar; down to the river, and up the zigzags to the Segantini Hut. The climb is to as demanding as I expected, but by no means impossible. There are lots of people around on all the paths, and the views to the west particularly good. The hut is busy, with its red and white painted lavatory. Somewhat above the hut there are lots of cairns, and out of the wind it is an excellent place to have lunch.

The afternoon is spent descending. Initially it is straightforward, but then there are plenty of places with steel ropes, rocks and big drops. Just before the Alp Languard, it levels off to a gentle walk through the meadows. As the weather is good and there is plenty of time, I walk down to the town through the woods, with intermittent views across the valley.

I am in good time for a gentle preparation for a good dinner. But a sleepless night.

Saturday 19

The morning is overcast with low cloud, and quite cool. I find the post office for stamps, and walk down to the Schloss Garage to catch the bus to St Moritz, for the funiculars to Cavaglia. It's still a little misty, but the sun is shining through. The initial direction is unclear but I am soon on the path that winds around the hillside of Piz Nair, which becomes narrow above steep grass and scree slopes.

The valleys are filled with clouds and the views of the mountains above them are good. As the path circles there are good close up views of Piz Julier. The clouds are reforming and out of the sun it is cold, with a light but increasing wind. I have lunch at the Pass Suvretta, and have to put on an extra layer. The walk down the valleys is rather bleak, with paths that are quite rough and not helped by the cyclists. The scenery is also rather bleak until there are woods in the main valley. I just miss one of the few stopping trains at Spinaz, but by walking quickly catch one at Bever, which gets me onto a bus at Samedan for an arrival back at the hotel, very tired, by 5.20.

The usual dinner, but no tablet (no Archers!), and an even earlier bed, for a good night's sleep.

Sunday 20

There had been rain overnight and new snow on the mountains. A leisurely breakfast and time in the room before leaving at ten. It's bright and cool with a fair amount of cloud around. As the day progresses the cloud melts away until the sky is almost clear blue.

I walk down the main street and onto a path that is parallel to the road and river. From Punt Muragl I follow the river Flax to its confluence with the Inn, and then follow that river. The weather is clearing from behind. There is a cool wind and there is considerable difference between the sun and shade. I follow the river as far as La Punt, where there is time for a drink before the train. I have a Weizenbier at the Gasthaus Krone.

The train takes me to Cinuos-Chail where there is the opportunity to walk up the side valley. For the walk I am adopted by a dog. I get the train back to Pontresina, and then to Surovas and the hotel.

Monday 21

A reasonable night. I am up soon after six, pack, bath etc, and down to an early breakfast at 7.20, which enables me to leave the hotel at 8.15 to get to the Alp Languard chair lift as it starts at 8.30. There are just three staff and two punters before me.

The valley is frosty with views of the sun above, and the ride is very cold; I should have worn my gloves. At the alp all is bright with hardly a cloud in the sky, and so it continues all day, with wonderful views. I make my way up the Piz Languard path, making reasonable progress. It is overtaken by several folk and I don't achieve the signpost time. As the path goes straight up the ridge I take the left turn to Fuorcla Pischa, with far fewer walkers. All the time there are tremendous views of the Berninas and the Paradis Hütte. I have to follow the red and white markers as there is no path through the glacial debris. There is a very good place for lunch beside a small lake before I make the last ascent to the Fuorcla Prünella, where there is some soft snow still, but with more good views.

The descent is rather slow and tricky with lots of loose boulders and soft snow. It is also a time consuming process and tiring particularly on the ankles. There is just one man and a boy following me down the path otherwise everywhere is peaceful. After a lot of effort I get down to the alp building from where there is a reasonable track. This makes the going a lot easier even if there is a lot of distance to cover. The weather is still excellent although towards the end of the valley is very narrow and how are you lose the sun.

At Chamues-ch there is a bus waiting to depart which I get to Samedan with a connection to Pontresina, getting me back earlier than expected. The last part of the walk down the valley tokens less than the signpost time.

I have a bath and get into the dining room at about seven. Seems to be a lack of staff and is slow.

Tuesday 22

The day dawns overcast and indeed I am walking either in the clouds or near to them all day with a cold wind.

I start by getting the post bus from the hotel to the Ospizio Bernina, which is going on to La Prese, but my ticket only is valid to Ospizio. I plan to climb Piz Campasc above Lago Bianco, but the very cloudy and misty conditions mean that there are few views and so I only go out of the way. I make my way down to the lake and start to walk around it first in the direction of Alp Grüm. Soon the mist gets worse and I am walking with no views and in a cold wind. It is a relief to get to the station for a cup of hot chocolate before the train takes me back down the valley.

Wednesday 23

Over night there has been heavy rain and as dawn breaks it is changing to wet snow. Soon the latter is settling and becoming heavy.

I get the bus to St Moritz, and change to the Bergell post bus. The drive up the valley is through heavy snow which is settling in although soft. When we started down the zigzags into the Italian Valley gradually the snow changes to rain which continues to fall heavily all of the way.

It is raining as I walk around the town, taking photos with snow on the hills above. After buying a bottle of Valtlina, I get the bus back at 12.08, changing at Silvaplana onto the Pontresina bus to the Post. There is a four minute connection to the train at Surovas, which is quiet to Alp Grüm, with photo opportunities. The train back comes about ten minutes later, which is good as it is cold and winding on the station.

Back in Pontresina I treat myself to a hand painted bowl and some provisions at though the coop although there is a difference of opinion as to how much I tender at the latter.

Back to the hotel for rest, upgrade to IOS9, dinner, and a poor night (coffee in the morning?).

Thursday 24 Maloja to Silvaplana

I get the 9.18 bus to Maloja. There is still snow on the ground but a lot has melted, and more does during the day. There is plenty of sun but with clouds which get to predominated more as the day goes by, as does the northerly wind. I take a walk around the village, especially to talk in the view down the Bergell valley. Then it is onto the path alongside the lakes, via Isola and Sils Maria, where I take photographs of the Nietzsche House for PMAG.

A little further along I am tempted by a ride up and down the Fuschellas Cable Car for the view, but the snow means that there is not much to do without setting out into the snow.

At the bottom I continue but I am getting tire and it is quite cold (wind and cloud). And so I head to Silvaplana to catch the bus to Pontresina for a little time in the room before dinner.

A decent night.

Friday 25

I awake to a foggy morning. After breakfast I get the train at 9.06 to Ospizio. All the way up the valley we are in the fog and a party of Japanese tourists see nothing of the views. At Ospizio the sun appear and we begin to see the mountains and the tourists jump about taking photographs.

It is freezing and windy and the first part of my walk is down the road as there is too much snow on the path. But the views are wonderful. Eventually I can join the path and it is a beautiful way through the woods and alps, discarding layers as I go. At La Rösa I cross the road and join a path contouring around the hillside, partly through the woods until I reach the entry to the Val da Camp. There is a house flying the Swiss cross and the Union Jack. The valley is beautiful with the fresh snow on the mountains contrasting with the very bright green meadows. I have time to go about half way up the valley before returning by a different path to Sfazu on the road where there is a bus back to Pontresina at 16.05. Of course it arrives spot on time, but costs me CHF10.40 up to Ospizzio which isn't covered by my card. But it does deliver me to the hotel entrance!

Saturday 26 Belvedere

A reasonable night, and up at 6.30, and out by 8.40 for the bus to Punt Muragl, and funicular to Muttoas Muragl. There is quite a bit of snow around, but I largely depends on which direction in relation to the sun. The path down to the stream is largely clear but the other side has even in the shade and a lot of snow remains. Some people are going up to the Segantinni Hütte which I don't fancy, and several on my route. It turns out to be not bad with just one icy bit over a big drop, but most of the snow on the path has melted. The weather, after some early cloud, has turned out to be wall to wall sunshine.

I have come out without any food; I hoped to treat myself to Rösti at the Scharfberg Hütte, but there is none on the menu. The views as ever are wonderful, and reaching the Alp Languard I find also no Rösti. The walk down to the valley is as calm and peaceful as last year, but with more snow in the views.

At the hotel I have a beer watching everyone go by and then retreat from the smoke to the room. Before dinner I pack and pay the bill.

Sunday 27 Pontresina to Worms Hotel Hüttl

It is a cold frosty morning and apart from around Zürich it turns out to be sunny all day.

I have my breakfast at 7.15, go for a short walk, and am easily ready for my transfer to the station at 8.45 for the 9.02 train, changing at Samedan, Chur and Mannheim. The trains are all comfortable and not too busy. The weather is first rate for the views going down to Chur.

The EC train starts out as three coaches attached to the normal train to Basel. There there is a lot of shunting in the fifty minutes and extra coaches attached, but all seem to be Swiss stock; the train is going as far as Hamburg. A dining car has been attached and so I have a plate of mushroom filled pasta with a quarter of Fechy; nothing special but enjoyable.

The train eventually fills up in Karlsruhe, but I then have only one more stop, changing to the local twin at Mannheim for the slow ride to Worms. It is a short easy walk to the Hotel Hüttl, but my room is on the second floor with no lift. The room is small, but comfortable, but a bit noisy from outside and the TV from the next room. But with the earplugs, I get to bed early for a good night. 45 €

Monday 28 Worms Hotel Hüttl

The day dawns with a clear sky which persists all day except for a few clouds.

Breakfast which is from 6.30 is surprisingly good in a room overlooking the market place. I take my time, and am out soon after eight. I have a good morning walking around the city and down to the river, and along it for a few kilometres and back through the Stadtgarten and past the zoo. Back in the town I look for somewhere to eat, and end up in a wine shop which has a reasonable buffet and a good glass of wine. The main course is weighed.

I have a rest in the afternoon, and the some more sightseeing: the Dom, the Luther memorial, the walls and synagogue, with a visit to the supermarket for provisions for tomorrow's journey.

Back to the room for another early night which is nearly as good as yesterday.

Tuesday 29 Worms to London Kings Cross Inn

Up for breakfast at seven and walk to the station for the 8.13 to Mannheim, half an hour before I need to. Another busy commuter train gets me there on time, with almost an hour to spare, which I spend in the 1st class lounge, with HC. The train is about fifteen minutes late, but as I have lots of time in Paris this is an advantage. It's very comfortable and I have a 'solo' seat on the upper deck. Breakfast is served, and we stop at Kaiserslautern and Saarbrücken.

We arrive at the Gare de l'Est about twenty minutes late and I decide not to leave my bag but spend a couple of hours or so in the waiting room, before walking to the Indian restaurant for a Thali and Lassi, before going to the Gare du Nord, where I find that I can check in when I arrive, two hours before departure. I sit and read and use the wifi. Boarding is delayed and when we do there is a use with announcements saying that the train is about depart when lots of people are still in the lounge. Apparently there was a problem with the train we were supposed to get. I think the substitute is one of the new ones.

It's a comfortable ride, stopping only at Ebbsfleet, and we arrive twenty minutes late. I stop outside Barclays to download the Archers, although I needn't have bothered as there is a decent BT signal in the ground floor room at the hotel. After a hot chocolate soon I am in bed for a good night.

Wednesday 30 London to home

Up at six for a shower, and out to get a newspaper and croissants, the latter of which I eat with the Nescafé supplied.

I leave my bag in the hotel and start out at 8.30 walking to the Vietnamese embassy to apply for my visa. It's a beautiful Autumn morning, and I walk part of the way through Hyde Park.