

# *"You're the Guy with Parkinson's"*

POEMS, PROSE AND PONDERINGS  
ON THE 'SWISS CAMINO'



**WITH WILL & CORRIE BOAG**

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## Day 1 - Rorschach to St Gallen

Rorschach was bed-free, so at midday we changed plans and decided to start walking as we really had no choice, and lucky for us, it was cool, so our journey had inadvertently begun. It was fairly easy going with a couple of testing hills but maybe a bit long for our first day. A sore hip and back for me, and a neck pain for Corrie was evidence of this. A point of interest along the way was a huge Rudolf Steiner building, unsure if it was a school or other educative space.

As I ponder on this man, I think of his writings, plays and poetry; his religious philosophy where science and spirituality blended together; his innovative natural methods in agriculture; his education techniques where rote learning of prescribed material was replaced by ideas and creative thinking. Steiner's ideas were big ideas and like the huge Swiss mountains... they were never going away. He talked in favour of the individual, and freedom to think your own thinking in all you do. There is no real political leader in Switzerland moulding society to suit their own agenda, and when decisions have to be made, they go to a referendum, there's no more individual freedom than that.

The people of Rorschach were not really au fait with pilgrim matters but the tourist office did give us a card with the name of a place that provided beds for pilgrims. St Gallen was a spread out town but we eventually found our place with an entrance door a head lower than me. There was no-one there and our phone number was not connecting so we asked the shop owner next door to call for us. It worked for her, so now we know to put a '0' in front of the number! The owners would be a while so we took a short walk.

We went for a coffee close by where the variegated tables and chairs clung to the sides leaving a large space in the middle. Soon, the loud sound of Argentinian Tango music suggested a good reason for this unoccupied area. Once a month people, young and old, put on their dancing shoes, hold each other closely and dance to the haunting sounds of this delightful music. A huge room normally filled with tables and chairs, was now a dancing floor with chairs and tables hugging the room sides.

It took us both back to our 'beginners' tango days' that were to help with my Parkinson's, so seeing these dancers passionately going through their exquisitely executed dance steps will have us return to this special art form in July. There is also a dance festival in town so there are even more omens coming our way.

Our hosts had arrived so we left this award winning coffee shop to be greeted by a Swiss man and his Spanish wife. They spoke no English so with Corrie's Spanish we had no trouble, and a very funny time. They showed us around their quaint refuge and we were to have this four bedroom house to ourselves, with a kitchen, food to cook, and a laundry. A soaking shower eased our pains as a heavier shower outside warned us of a probable testing day tomorrow.

## Dance to the tango and a mystery begins



### *The Tango*

*The tango's working class it must be said  
Its roots from lower class they were derived,  
It kept the slums and slaves alive - not dead  
In Argentine, a source of national pride.  
Like everything the tango has a structure  
Initial eight step moves give you a base,  
You then are free as any other creature  
To do your thing while never losing face.  
The tango is a dance - unlike no other  
It's curative as well as being fun,  
Just tangoing with your partner or your lover  
Can neurologically equal the sun.  
The focus of this dance specific movements  
May lead you to some quality improvements.*

## Day 2 - St Gallen to Herisau

I picked up a forgotten umbrella and slipped out to look for a croissant shop/bakery. 'More than usual' bells today also rang a bell for me, that many shops might be closed on this contemplative day. An hour before opening time I peered through a window at a croissant person and tried to balance my 'need for a croissant' look, so I didn't look too threateningly desperate at one end, and not too 'smarming trying to be charming' look, at the other. So I went for the old Parkinson's look and she smiled, probably a bit too sadly for my ego, but it was good for my hunger. She said this was a special opening just for you and sold me two hot fresh flaky croissants.

A steep hill beckoned us out of town as a great mass of water flowed then crashed beside us, its frothy surface spraying as it tumbled above and then beneath us. It was enthralling. I later asked a local about this waterfall and her reply stunned me. "We don't have one", she said "but there has been a lot of rain". How lucky we were to get this special treat and at the same time, without getting wet. How much of nature we must miss because we avoid the rain.

Our first orienteering test came, and I failed. The sign that never lies is the one with a large 'four' which we had seen once prior to this re-engagement. After that it is about reliability, and the most reliable is a yellow arrow with the word 'wanderweg'. What threw me off course though was the huge beetle painted on that same sign. In hindsight, I should have twigged that adding something else to the sign would mean that the sign would also signify something else, which it did. We never saw this obviously famous beetle but three puffing joggers confirmed that we were simply following a very popular rare insect. Two kilometres later we passed the same 'beetle on a sign' again, as we climbed once more up into the dark clouded hills.

We saw no other pilgrims but lots of joggers and walkers. Corrie was commenting that there were no cafes, (as our pilgrim track was diverted around towns and therefore away from the caffeine spaces), when we saw a small shed beside a large barn - a typical small farm arrangement. There was cake, yoghurt, drinks and fruit for fair prices and a drawer to put those fair prices in. We rested and replenished before a last long gradual climb above a magnificent Swiss-perfect man-made lake.

An older woman guided us to hotel accommodation as this is not a popular pilgrim town. There was no receptionist at the two hotels she recommended so this gave us cause for concern. The buzzer at the first informed us that it was fully booked, the second had a phone number that told us the location of a hidden key, which we used to find our resting place for tonight, like a hotel air b&b.

Having trouble again with photos and new technology but I'll say it again, 'it's good for the brain'.

Natural body language denies the idea of pre planning



### *The Forgotten Umbrella*

*Umbrella, there alone, it seems forgotten  
No use, no more, if someone doesn't use it,  
While others say: "don't take, it is verboten"  
I'll take it but ensure I don't abuse it.  
The other option is that it forgets  
And sits there for too long with no movement,  
It has a job, no wish to have regrets  
To keep one dry would be a marked improvement.  
We also want to be of use for ever  
Not watching as our life just passes by,  
Umbrella needs to keep us from the weather  
For us, there are more options we can try.  
Instead of being closed and of no use  
Just open up, and let our passion loose.*

### Day 3 - Herisau to St. Peterzell

Very steep but smaller hills at present, and leaning forward seems pretty important because balance for Pd (Parkinsons disease) people, wavers over time so important that we practice it. I often feel faint after I have walked a strenuous distance, combined with my abnormally low blood pressure. I also need to become confident with smaller hills so I'm ready for the taller ones. I have found that I need to take regular breaks and sit when I'm feeling dizzy. So the Swiss have been very accommodating by having benches in just the right place during exhausting mountain climbs.

I certainly don't have an issue with other walkers getting in the way, because there aren't any. Not one. It may be that it's a little cold (okay for us because it's less exhausting), and maybe they go to warmer climates until summer sets in. We're not sure but it's hard to even believe there is anyone anywhere, as it is so quiet and peaceful.

But there is one sound that ensures that the Swiss haven't all left town, the ubiquitous cow bell. I imagine the bell is there so they can be found in timbered or valley areas, but maybe it's a calming sound for better milk. The cows seem to be a symbol for Switzerland, as monuments, paintings, letter boxes and more, are often of cows. It reminds me of how the people of India adore their cows, except in Switzerland, they don't come into cafes, block traffic or act as roundabouts.

After a little research, I found that cow bells are used as a tracking device but now have been found also to have deleterious affects. It appears that large bells, predominantly worn by the larger beasts have inadvertently caused many of them to lose their hearing. This will be difficult for the very conservative Swiss to change, as they are very strong on tradition and culture, and see the bells to have an almost reverent status in this beautiful country.

As we wonder up and down elevator hills (their steeples, not the motorised type), we are amazed at the manicured countryside with grass growing right up to the houses as though it was fitted out with an external carpet. It is inviting the cows right up close to the house, becoming almost family, except I could not imagine eating one of my relatives. That would be a tradition too far if the cows were also treated to that kind of reverence. No crops so far, just grass, the food that produces good Swiss milk, cheeses and butter.

It hasn't all been sight seeing, for it was a challenge to stay on the right path. With a mixture of luck, asking people - on the street, in their homes, while driving, and at an ATM (a scary place to carry on a conversation), we were able to stay on track and arrive at our lodgings high up on a perfect viewing hill. But we didn't take the right path. I blamed the woman at the hotel, but I eventually worked out that it was my fault, and instead we walked up on a pathless pasture to be met by the owner of our attic lodgings.

So for whom does the bell toll



### *The Bell*

*The constant bell, it rings across the fields  
Unmusical, not there to please the ear,  
To warn of predators, the bell it peels  
Not getting lost deletes the farmers fear.  
The varied sounds identify the beast  
Its age, its sex, species or even name,  
Cataloging them from best to least  
From notoriety to those with fame.  
For people, it is there to tell the time  
Or indicate it's now the time to pray,  
To come and go from school, you hear a chime  
For some, the sound means dinner every day.  
The bell, it is a unique Switzerland thing  
The challenge is: 'identify the ring'.*

## Day 4 - St. Peterzell to Wattwil

A stream of cloudy light woke me as I climbed up from the floor where our five mattresses covered the entire floor. Our new young German friend Brigitte slept on mattress number five under the window, while those possibly with more need of the bathroom (Corrie and I), slept near the door. Here in our attic bedroom sharing a hill with another house, our window showed us St Peterzell, a cute s-shaped village five hundred metres below.

Our young wonderful sleeping companion who was great company, also helped us with accommodation tips, 'walking in Switzerland hints', and translations with our new hosts. It was not just a huge three story farm house but also a government social experiment. It was expertly run nearly entirely by those with a disability who were efficient, maybe fastidious at times. They ran to a tight schedule and because we had technical problems, they moved us off to a room for those who were late. I've worked with disabled people in the past and the biggest challenge I've faced has been their 'uncivil directness' where the message is clearly appropriate, but the tone and the look can sometimes be off-putting.

We said goodbye to our hosts, hugged Brigitte, thanking her for all the tips, especially accommodation, while we were privately thankful for her quiet sleeping habits, and took off gleefully downhill. Unlike our 'no path' crawl yesterday pulling ourselves up by grabbing grass tufts, today we had a sort of path, identified by a sign we could see one hundred metres ahead on the far side of the paddock. Through the village, up a long 'hard to keep your balance' hill we continued our well-honed Swiss roller coaster ride. Beautiful views took our mind off the tough parts as we walked through steep dandelion fields and dairy farmyards, the farmer not even giving us a glance as he went about his busy day.

The pathways, often through farms, were not always obvious, so we would look for a distant camino symbol, and head for it. Paths were often not obvious on farms because they hadn't been worn down by hoards of winter walkers, and often the grass had hidden them. It is no-one's task to maintain what is only a path, because we actually make the path itself. If there are no walkers there is no path, and there are too few resources to make any changes. Remember, it is someone's property and we have no idea about their attitude towards pilgrims strolling through, and many, I imagine, would prefer we didn't.

We are still getting used to the constant hills although I do look forward to their mysterious variation from the norm. I find them mysterious in the sense that some are hidden by trees and bushes so you get a mixture of plant life. Different trees and underlying vegetation attract different bird species, and our awareness is high, owing to potential obstacles. Down our last hill of the day and up another to our first monastery stay run by a Brazilian Franciscan monk. I wonder what mysteries he has for us?

Something becomes a disability if you think it so



### *Some Paths*

*Some paths were steep so need to be aware  
Be careful, watch, and do not look around,  
While others fall away, great need for care  
That you don't trip and end up on the ground.  
Precarious paths that even test the fearless  
Then there are those that simply fade away,  
Obscured are some below the new spring grass  
Then endless ones that won't lead you astray.  
The paths we take are all of these and more  
Each day there are decisions that we make,  
At times with confidence, at times unsure  
We make a choice of which path we will take.  
That path will take us where we need to go  
For now, tomorrow - another dice we'll throw.*

## Day 5 - Wattwil to Eschenbach

So still and light, not a shadow in the sky, nor even a murmur from the fauna. We entered the four hundred year old monastery dining room with some respect. I chose bits and pieces from the simply laid out offerings before me and went to sit down, when this very courteous and confident forty five year old approached me. I liked his energy as he greeted me: "I'm Trevor, you're a pilgrim are you not"? I find this term difficult to own, as I'm not a pilgrim in the truest sense of the word, so I gave a non-controversial, "yes".

We sat while this seemingly astute corporate like person soon brought us into his reality. He was part of a group of men touring different countries promoting their tried and tested (for many), programs for addictions. Trevor had lost everything – his family, his job, his home, the lot... through alcohol. Ten years later he is doing well, and this is what I saw, when I met him.

He is part of a program called Fadenza da Esperanza that is based on using your situation as an opportunity to bring about change in yourself, and then slowly and quietly helping others help themselves through this philosophy. We had an inspirational chat over breakfast then gave our hugs and kisses to the first ever Swiss person to ever complete this program.

Our lively chat did not help our 'direction finding ability' as we walked for half a kilometre in the wrong direction. We soon recovered and climbed and climbed for an hour and then downhill for five hours through stunning countryside. The Alps soon appeared and we were now seeing snowy mountains in their fullness, looking even more stunning with their massive green carpeted foreground.

The plethora of variegated hills and valleys provided scenery that could cure the pains of constant walking. We took breaks on the red benches that were provided, to also replenish our energy, and chatted to a person walking the other way who was amazed at the small packs we were carrying, and very impressed.

We started with the optic man. I asked him if he spoke English. He said: "only hello and I love you". I said: "you don't know me well enough for the second part so we'll have to stick to just saying hello", whereby the middle aged businessman customer joined in with a laugh. He then happily told me where I could find accommodation by having his English speaking customer translate.

We couldn't find the town council he recommended, but after getting the telephone number from the bakery girls, then ringing this very patient 'finder of beds', and more directions from the florist girls, we ended up staying in a gorgeous home overlooking the Alps with Margaret, Kurt and Gypsy the cat. We learnt a lot about the Swiss over dinner and look forward to chatting and laughing with them again over breakfast.

By the way, I called in on the optic man on our way to our new home, thanked him, and told him that I now loved him.

Use your situation as an opportunity for change



### *Trevor*

*"I'm Trevor, you're a pilgrim are you not?"  
I said I was, although I simply walk,  
His wife, his home, his kids, he'd lost the lot  
Addiction did it all - that was our talk.  
Fadenza da Esperanza - is its name  
Taught them to be clean and then help others,  
The first Swiss man to graduate - his fame  
Excited that he'll be there for his brothers.  
A program such as this Pd could use  
At first you learn the things that you can do,  
With changes made it's time to light the fuse  
And toss about the things that work for you.  
Young Trevor's loss has turned his life around  
Now we can use the skills that he has found.*

## Day 6 - Eschenbach to Pfaffikon

Margaret was very excited to see us because we were her very first guest. She said it was so sudden that she had not even purchased a 'guest book'. As she apologised, I encouraged her to buy one there and then for we would love not only to write something, but to be the first in her book. She felt she couldn't just leave us there on our own, so I said we were happy just to be there and rest, wash clothes, blog etc. so she gave us a beer and left.

We know now from our hosts that there is no official Swiss language. However, a rough analysis of this provides a rough guide: German to the east, French to the west, Italian to the south, and drawing a line from north to south through Bern it is a certain dialect different from the others. Not much use to us though as we need to speak English or Spanish, the latter not high on the Swiss priority list. No matter the language, like most Swiss we have met, our hosts had a great sense of humour, were very friendly, astute and interested.

The light streamed into our room, showing off the Alps and the pretty town below. Tasty simple food awaited us as we ate with our anxious (remember we're their first guests) hosts. Kurt (a company director) had a work day at home and we talked about cold holidays, retirement ages (Switzerland and Australia are the same), cheeses and wine.

A perfect walking day up another regular Swiss perpendicular hill and into our first Swiss old forest, small birds rejoicing in the warmth, with church bells and cow bells reminding us of the country we are in. The landform is a little less hilly, flattening out now as we approach a large lake. A few runners and bikes ensured we walked on the left and behind each other on the more narrow paths. But no pilgrims again, maybe we are too fast for them!

We had to decide whether we go on to a 'town too far' or, look for something in a town that does not advertise reasonable accommodation costs. I hailed down two older women who couldn't understand us, so they called out across the road to a more elderly woman who could speak a little English. She pointed up a hill (of course) to a place we could not see, so she took us a little closer and gave a less vague description.

We soon came across this large farm, the farmer knew less English than we knew Swiss, so he rang his daughter-in-law who knew it well enough. We had two options for lodgings: a straw bed in a trailer or a real bed in a shed – we took the shed. This option meant we had to walk down to a small shed for our shower, a larger shed for our breakfast and maybe back down the hill for dinner. However the wifi news is better which they have on this very enterprising farm. It also has a small shop, a flower shop, party rooms and a large space for dance nights. We're tired, so we'll look for food to eat in our large shed, wash in the smaller shed, then off to bed in the smallest and cosier shed.

It's not the language you speak but the attitude you show



### *Swiss Language*

*From north to south, central to east they talk  
In German - dialects though make it Swiss,  
They speak with confidence, the way they walk  
The Swiss German is very hard to miss.  
Then to the east, It's French that now is spoken  
It's much the same as what they speak in France,  
Then to the south, Romansch it is a token  
And just below, Italian gets a chance.  
The Swiss must learn two languages at school  
With German-French most popular of all,  
Then French-German the second one that's cool  
Italian, Romansch, low on the roll call.  
Another one is English they must learn  
And they all know it, from Rorschach to Bern.*

## Day 7 - Pfaffikon to Alpthal

It's the cows' shed. They sauntered out underneath our dorm of sixteen beds and only us. As the cattle moved out from being milked they paused below our window, not to welcome us, but to have their head cleaned or scratched with one of those 'car wash type rotators'. Then the milker-man began washing them before they entered their day-long dining room to refuel yet again.

On our floor just down the tool-shed hallway and left into the hay-loading dining room was the engine room. From here the tractor moved great loads of hay down to the cows to keep them quiet, dropping a few small pieces on the way. The cows returned from breakfast so quietly. I knew because I was finding the shed-beds a bit hard, and thought it would relax me looking at the cows below.

From my shed I could also see the two fancy trailers that had the straw beds. We could have taken that option because when we left, the tenants had still not appeared, and I would have loved to experience this unique Swiss mattress. It was downstairs to our breakfast room which adjoined the cows' dining room. I know this because our chef came through the door leading to their eating room. No tractor however was needed for our breakfast as we were only two.

We left early because we had a 'two hour hill' to climb, mostly through a very dark 'tall-tree forest', then we paused at the ubiquitous red benches and looked back at our recent achievements. Then it was a long and more gently sloping terrain that took us through sumptuous daisy decorated fields. These yellow spotted fields swept down to a beautiful lake with a snowy mountain backdrop, across to a very busy and noisy rocky river, surrounded immaculate farm houses, and graced our winding narrow road and tiny trails.

We stopped for lunch in Einsiedeln, a gorgeous town with a spectacular monastery. Inside the church, I thought for a moment that I was in the Sistine Chapel. Extraordinary frescoes filled the walls and ceilings, a sight not only for the religious, but for art lovers too. But not time enough to be too thorough, it was time for our last lap. A perfect day for us to walk as we enjoy a cool edge to the weather, and having coolness in the shadows also provides an incentive to leave our rest spots, or we might not. Late in the day with Corrie leaving me well behind (when she senses the finishing line she's unstoppable), there were a few drops. With some thunder and lightning no-one could catch her now.

Finally through a small valley opening into a tiny village we found our delightful little b&b that the last town's energetic information officers had organised for us. The owner said she would be out, so the key was under a white pot next to a white flower and two white shells, and our room was called 'Stefan'. Stefan was big but light and quite roomy, but unlike our farmer, he had towels for us, wow. Stefan's window also showed us a huge rock-like mountain that we can nearly touch. We might tomorrow.

It's better to have a shed that's home than a house that isn't



### *A Living Shed*

*The shed, a simple structure in itself  
Is home to a variety of things,  
At first I think of tools upon a shelf  
A lawn mower, some wood or rubbish bins.  
It maybe there to store the winter hay  
For sheep, who also come to 'shed' their fleece,  
And cows, that come to give their milk each day  
Or us, alone, to find a little peace.  
The Swiss however have another view  
A place to sleep when you are tired from walking,  
A shower, a loo, a place that you can eat  
A room to write your blog, debrief while talking  
With others who are walking you can meet.  
So if you want a rest and a cheap bed  
In Switzerland there'll be a little shed.*

## Day 8 - Alpthal to Brunnen

As we trialled our new bed in a real house, it rained heavily, and, all night. Switzerland's weather has followed this pattern ever since we've been here, rarely raining after mid-morning.

Previously we had been looking for dinner places with no luck. A passer-by apologetically informed us there was no food in this town, so with forlorn faces we went home. But we were lucky, our mythological b&b manager turned up and gave us a version of tomorrow's breakfast for dinner. We found out from her, that the mountain staring at us through our window was called Mythen Grossen, while its little sister alongside was called Mythen Keinen. Grossen's claim to legend status is that it has a restaurant on top where many climb nearly 2000 metres where they are rewarded with lunch.

We left Simone to prepare for her next guests and install copious red geranium pots in the window boxes. As I predicted, we had a perfect day with fine cloud cover. We felt tired just looking at that hill, but knew it would eventually go down, and for a long way. Stopping every one hundred metres to debrief, we climbed for two hours through dense forests, and then luxuriated in the glorious views including the now not so distant snowy Alps (half a metre of snow fell this week). At different angles they provided various vistas, while Grossen and Keinen came closer at every sighting.

Soon we could see the last upward metres and stopped for a drawn-out viewing of two stunning lakes. As we had coffee on a massive hotel deck in the shadows of Grossen and Keinen, we knew the hard walk would have its rewards. Down the hill we could have probably done cart wheels but didn't, but we did however perform all the forward tango steps, and backward ones, for when Corrie was coming uphill. The mountains joined us all the way down to Schwyz, a stunning town with magnificent buildings (one fully decorated with beautiful artworks), surrounding a magical square.

We ate a co-op store salad lunch in a concrete park watching African adopted kids playing in their colourful UNICEF shirts, their proud Swiss parents watching on. Another family with young children, all speaking Arabic, were also having co-op lunches and playing in the park. It was Corrie's home stretch run now, so it's fast. It was a stretch down a valley with banks so steep even the goats paused, then finally down into the canal town of Brunnen.

We reserved ahead because it was heavily booked, however, we have a six-bed room all to ourselves in a spotless Kloster Haus with a view of Grossen and Keinen. The head nun was very friendly, maybe too much so, as her hand shake gave me more pain than my back, knee and foot-pad combined. She was very efficient though, with instructions written in English and German. We washed our clothes, put them in a real drying room then left to dine in town.

It can be enlightening to learn the patchwork of your mind



## *Dopamine*

*Our dopamine is key to our behaviour  
Cognition, motivation and reward,  
Increasing dopamine could be our saviour  
To lose it to Pd we can't afford.  
Releasing it when we get a return  
It helps to tell our body what is good,  
Promotes our brain to recall and confirm  
And then repeat the action as we would.  
This chemical, it changes not the pleasure  
Instead, it tells us how much it's desired,  
What is it that we absolutely treasure  
That energises us, not makes us tired.  
With Parkinson's disease we can still grow  
With tangible returns producing flow.*

## Day 9 - Brunnen to Stans

Doris, the breakfast nun, thrust out her hand and before I could recall her handshake from the night before, she crushed it again (all forty kilos of her). Apart from the damage she was doing to unsuspecting guests, she was delightful, funny, and had the energy to 'run' the distances we were walking, and we got all of this without her having to speak one word of English. She was one of those few people who can communicate well without either party knowing what the other is saying. Her gesticulations, and charade-like expressions could have been a universal language. Soon photos were taken, directions were given and farewells were had, but this time, with my left hand, I grabbed both of the nuns by the left shoulder with my right hand behind my back, then gave them three kisses each.

Large puddles were signs of a rainy night but as usual no wet weather in sight. At the first crossroad we said goodbye to our Swiss neighbours, Kerin and her father. She had spent time in Canada so was fluent in English. She told us about Rutli, a village they would pass through this morning. We had heard that it was a treacherous route and Kerin confirmed this, so we avoided it. By the way, Rutli was very famous. It was where three men from three different cantons (regions) got together and decided to form Switzerland in 1291. We pondered this on our first ferry crossing across a Swiss lake.

We walked past some goats who thought we had something for them and would have trampled us to find out, but for the fence. Sauntering along by the lake for a while gave us yet another perspective of the stunning scapes. In the background we could hear the cow, sheep, and goat bells competing with the bells of the local church, that were informing us of lunchtime.

Corrie got another salad, as I looked around unsuccessfully for a dining spot. I wanted more than this so I returned to the co-op to buy some extra stuff. I said no to the receipt but eagerly grasped a free large block of Swiss chocolate because it was mother's day. I have stopped trying to work out why I got one and Corrie didn't. My mother's day gift was shared with Corrie and Ludwig, a retiree from Austria, on a red lunch chair next to a small chapel, so when it began to rain we had the perfect change room.

We passed quite a few family bike outings who greeted us enthusiastically as we walked by. The last few kilometres were through grass fields, and except for the little pilgrim sign, we probably would have looked for another route altogether. As you are now well aware of my wife's manic afternoon sprints, and because of this, she hadn't noticed an older Swiss couple wanting to chat.

They were full of information and gave me some addresses for the night and soon left, as it continued to rain for our last four kilometre dash into the majestic Swiss valley river town of Stans. We've now graduated to a hotel, because the cow sheds and straw beds are all taken.

Better to be able to communicate than speak



### *A Greeting*

*A hand shake seems to be the global greeting  
Accepted as a norm for both the genders,  
A gentle non-invasive way of meeting  
Accepted such by most givers and senders.  
And then the hug, a bit more intimate  
Included with a handshake or a kiss,  
Depends on what may seem the better fit  
Then namaste and bow give touch a miss.  
At first the Swiss will kiss after the hand shake  
And then it moves to kisses on both cheeks,  
Two kisses, sometimes three will be the trait  
No matter what the gender that one meets.  
Whatever way you choose it's such a treat  
To make a friend of anyone, you meet.*

## Day 10 - Stans to Flueli-Ranft

Off and up into the now sunny hills, but with just enough chill to keep us happy on the track. Long hills today, but after nearly losing our breath altogether yesterday, we are finding most hills are fine now, or almost. We passed farmers cutting grass (about the only work being done in the fields for we have seen no crops), one woman digging truffles, and a few boys out working with their dads, with one dad busy fencing. Fences in Switzerland are made up of some small bits of aluminium or wood (the posts) which are hammered into the ground, then a coloured ribbon joins them together – simple. When the cattle go to the dairy, a small ribbon is held one metre above the ground wherever they need to stop them deviating off course. They are also strung across highways so the cattle can travel safely crossing the roads and the driver has plenty of warning.

The hills flattened out and became ridge lines where we would either go over the top or mostly, as it was today, go round the contoured edges. Not so many seats in the last two days but now they are appearing once again in all the right places. We passed a few ‘day’ hikers, had a brief chat to mostly Swiss, then continued on through paddocks where sometimes the path is only obvious because someone walked on it the day before. We literally walked past the farmer’s front door, through his machinery shed, dodging tractors and dogs. It’s hard to imagine that this is a designated pathway for pilgrims. The paths would often enter a dark forest with a small timber yard, then onto maybe a local road (so far never a major road), and through towns or circle round them.

We passed a lot of fixed cranes today and every other day, set up to build ordinary houses, well, maybe not so ordinary, for most are intricate with those steep pitched roofs, shuttered windows and timber finish. Our finish time was underestimated on the walk today and we ran out of water. I therefore asked a local, we would never ask a walker for it’s not fair to their obvious planning and foresight; the extra weight they have carried for hours; and the vulnerability we may have inadvertently placed on them. So I asked a minister (walking towards a huge modern church), for water, and it seemed to thrill him to oblige and become yet another part of our journey.

Down and down we went into a deep valley with a turbulent rocky stream and up a breathtaking pathway on one of those hills. Close now to our accommodation. No, it’s not the first building (the glorious Hotel Paxmontana stately in its character, flaunting in its beauty, and ageless in its stature). Instead our home, ‘Bruder Klaus’, in the gully below, was much more affordable and uncrowded (just us). Alas, no food, so we found a nearly geschlossenes (closed) mini mart to buy breakfast and the nearly geschlossenes restaurant for a quick dinner. As always, the five star view from our one star room was priceless as we unfurled our sleeping bags (scarves), spread out our rationed blankets, and finish writing to you.

A forest is a natural home to multitudes



### *The Truffle*

*The truffle is a fungus underground  
That gathers round the roots of certain trees,  
In white and black, from east to west they're found  
In cold countries for your taste buds to please.  
They're used to garnish ready-to-serve dishes  
Inserted under skins of meat for flavour,  
As butter, they fulfil consumers wishes  
Infused in olive oil for one to savour.  
In Switzerland below the oaks and beech  
A working dog that has a special nose,  
A smell that no one human nose can reach  
It finds it quick, such skill it always shows.  
The truffle is a trophy, not a trifle  
The bonus is, the hunter needs no rifle.*

## Day 11 - Flueli Ranft to Lungern

Another regular morning climb took us past some older day-walkers, dozens of bike-riders of all ages, along similar variegated paths and familiar landscapes. We came down from the forests and the cows to see a lake in a narrow valley, the sun mimicking the view with nature's reflection in the water aside a tiny sandy beach. There were small boats, kayaks and the odd fishing boat. We walked for a couple of kilometres between a small passenger railway line and a lake on a hill-shaded narrow track, stopping for photo shoots on tiny sandy spots with benches.

We talked to a couple of day-walkers, then a young man in a park, to enquire about the striking white mountains we were following. He said he had not seen them (I wondered how could you not), when another man came by to inform us they were the Schwarzhorns. This means black horns, indicating that they looked like a set of cow horns, but I was amazed that no-one had ever noticed (not recorded at least) the interesting face in between them. Maybe it was me, after all, images are by definition, mostly imagined.

It was now another long and often steep climb and that is where we met Martin from Bern. He was taking his holidays by going walking, so we walked with him until our destination. He told us of the importance of the 'canton', each having its own constitution. There are twenty six cantons, each one being responsible for its own healthcare, welfare, law enforcement, public education and taxation. They do vary, which is sometimes a problem, especially because of all the hassles associated with moving from one canton to another.

He told us of the excellent political system of Switzerland. I came to understand that there are four parties and they agreed to share the presidency, so there is a new one each year. He added that they only differ slightly, and there are only minor changes of process over fairly similar policies. The parties elect a leader who has limited powers, and for one year only. When there is a rare desire to change policy, it goes to a referendum where changes are rare.

Talking about work he mentioned his daughter's luck, and added, with maybe a little perseverance, she was able to serve as an unpaid apprentice so that she could get her dream job as a pre-school teacher. On the whole, I understood there is little chance of young people getting their choice of work, while older people struggle to get work at all.

The three of us finished off the day with a long walk around the side of a lake where there was too much sun, and the Schwarzhorns coming closer with each step, its face ever changing. Doubling back wearily along the other side of this gorgeous lake with its waterfall cascading in full view, we were delighted to meet Susan, our new and equally gorgeous land-lady who led us to our chalet. The Schwarzhorns looked down on us, as we looked up at them from our perfect window view.

How deep are we willing to go to find our true reflection



### *Reflections*

*The lake shows clear to us a true reflection  
Of what it is that it can clearly see,  
For us it's when we look in its direction  
We see it just in our vicinity.  
Depending where the sun projects its light  
And where you are when you look in the lake,  
Is what you'll see so clearly in your sight  
And know the picture true reflections make.  
When I reflect, I sometimes see unclearly  
Not all reflections follow one main theme,  
And where I look may sometimes cost me dearly  
While misty thoughts may weaken my lights beam.  
Reflection helps to lessen my steep climb  
And helps me clear an over-burdened mind.*

## Day 12 - Lungern to Brienzwiler

Susan was a hoot, loved a joke, and was very engaging as she took us to her small one-room chalet out the back. In one of our talks she mentioned her daughter who lived in Australia where we live, and suggested we visit her. One of the many funny things she did was lighting a candle for breakfast when I said the overhead light was too bright. I also had fun with her grandkids by miming and speaking in our own different languages, and met my 'second dog' who, like the other one I met earlier, came and sat on my feet then just lent on me as though I was there for that purpose.

We said our farewells then walked up into the hills through gorgeous rainforests with moss-covered rocks and tree bases. The ground was covered in autumnal leaves while the new spring and evergreen ones shadowed us as we walked. Above all of this were huge vertical rocks which even the Swiss could not use, while below, huge fences protected cars and mountain trains from falling rocks. We walked with silence for a while until the sound of cars once more indicated yet another pathway, and a restaurant.

A large man on a motorbike motored up to our restaurant, his helmet removal indicating someone our age. Roger was retired and very happy to be out on his 'once in a while' Triumph bike. He spends time now with his myriad of grandkids and paints as a hobby. We were very curious about nature's landscape painting right in front of us and asked him about it. These three superb mountain peaks, now only a gully away, were the Eiger, the Monch, and the Jungfrau. The story goes that the 'monk' (Monch) is in the middle to protect the 'virgin' (Jungfrau) from the formidable 'ogre' (Eiger). In the shadow of these impressive peaks we said goodbye to this chef of forty years and wished him well.

Soon back onto our leaf-covered path once more we met a Swiss couple with less grey hair than me. The male partner told me about the wonderful open air museum in Brienzwiler, the town we are heading to today. It featured examples of all original Swiss buildings from the twenty to thirty Swiss cantons (regions) in Switzerland. Each house/shed contained original tools and machinery used, as well as a live cheese-making show. Once he had finished he said: "we would like to sing a song for you", so they sang. It was 'Waltzing Matilda' so of course I joined in. They were impressed with the strength and tone of my voice which assured me that voice exercises are working.

Our home town is a quiet little village with only one small shop, but dinner was cooked for us and it was the best meal we have eaten in Switzerland, and with a dessert bonus. Now we are enjoying after-dinner chatting with our husband and wife hosts (a proper 'refugio'), and Herman, who is a perennial walker and an author of detective novels. If you are German and like mysteries, his name is Herman Schunder and his books are called: Hautnah and Theunes Lehigh.

Let's, sing a song



*Ogre, Monk and Virgin*

*We saw them as we glanced up from the track  
Three grey-white beauties looking through the mist,  
The Jungfrau first, the tallest at the back  
A virgin, though she has been climbed, this miss.  
The Munch is next, it is the virgins shroud  
A monk, no less, of sympathy and grace,  
The smallest is the Eiger, oh so proud  
An ogre with its sheer, dramatic face.  
Then down the track an older couple came  
The three of us, we sang beneath the trees,  
Becoming one with those three peaks of fame  
Amidst their shadows and cool mountain breeze.  
And said Isaiah: "those hills will burst with song  
While all the trees will clap their hands, so strong".*

## Day 13 - Brienzwiler to Interlaken

A light low ceiling of cloud barely kept the sun hidden as it attempted to break free at any time. The cloud kept its cool and hovered over us as we climbed. Very long but gently sloped. I never thought I would call hills like this gentle but it's all relative. Walking up here above sharp drops and looking back with a view of the glistening green lake makes the climb even more gentle.

Different gradients aren't the whole story behind the degree of difficulty of any particular slope, instead it is a compilation of things. It's the length of that steep slope and how high your energy levels are. Some people like me, walk better in the morning cool but this then depends on whether my medications have kicked in, or not. Having low blood pressure means that continuous steep walking can result in a fainting spell and a fall could be disastrous. On the other hand, I find hill and mountain climbing more interesting and feel much more satisfied after a challenging walk. Downhill can be dangerous, but if alert, it can be fun. And Corrie finds nothing better than a very fast level track.

The white mountains were a perfect backdrop to the lake, as they hovered in a misty haze. We murmured with excitement as we looked back from path corners, through trees and from welcome benches. A goat herder was on one of these corners and told us that she was fixing fences to keep the goats in because they had found a gap in the plastic fence, lifting it and walking on to the road. As we talked, her two beautiful dogs treated us as their own, sitting on our feet (as they do) and leaning against us. These were the herders of the goats, helping her keep them confined to a certain area. She pointed to the snowy peaks on the other side of the valley saying she would soon take them there to make cheese.

Along more roller coaster paths, we snuggled past the tall smooth timber of this light green leafy forest. We walked past a waterfall that crossed over the road which we then crossed over with a plank of wood. It continued as a half metre flow across the road before falling off the road's edge and plummeting one hundred metres below.

Our next encounter was with a young Taiwanese couple. They were full of questions about our walking exploits, wanted a picture, didn't want China, and much preferred Switzerland. We farewelled them on their day's walk, they buen camino'd us on our longer walk, as we shook their strong hands. Down at lake level we passed a huge set of two storey units that were housing Indian families only, while further along the lake they had very basic construction worker type 'no window' sheds, where we saw mainly Chinese. We are unaware of why there are these two quite independent communities here.

A final encounter at our lodgings with author Herman, who was sitting quietly after his last walking day. We shook hands with our German friend and went to try the gastronomic international fare of Interlaken.

## The fading art of trust



### *The Swiss Dog Lean*

*We had just met, but built instant rapport  
She came to me as soon as I did beckon,  
Then lent on me, my shoe she laid her paw  
She saw my thigh, on this she put her neck on.  
A goat herder, her job took concentration  
She'd focus on her task no matter what,  
And when relaxed she had the same fixation  
To give her all was what she ne'er forgot.  
This mindful dog was giving me a lesson  
Be present with whatever you are doing,  
If not, then this could be your true confession  
Remember that this goal is worth pursuing.  
Be dogged as you better your connections  
Enriching same, as like a dog's affection.*

## Day 14 - Interlaken to Merligen

A howling wind with hard and heavy rain had sort of overdone my obviously too fervent a prayer for cool weather. But we had the right gear except for my non-weatherproof shoes that dry soon after with the heat of my foot. It is a simple trade-off where to enjoy comfortable shoes I have to get wet now and then, but not for long. Corrie had 'wet weather' shoes but light and comfortable at the same time so no issues, if she avoided the puddles.

We left this large town enormously popular with Indians and Chinese. Some theories that were put to me were that the Indians see it like a hill station where they go to in India during the very hot summers to enjoy the mountain cool. The Chinese however see it as an opportunity to climb well-known mountains in the Alps and tick a bucket list item, or maybe this has something to do with their ancient pilgrimages to the five Chinese mountains.

We had lost the path at Interlaken but knew all we needed to do was keep the lake in sight. So we kept to the main road, the wind and rain getting stronger and heavier. After a long while we found one of those rare coffee shops. The generous cafe owner took out a map and directed us back onto the bush track. If it's not too dangerous, these tracks tend to keep out the wind and rain, so can act as a bit of a safe haven while adding more interest to our walk.

The wet weather sights continued to amaze as we watched the lake become like high choppy seas, at times spraying well over our pathway. The clouds seemed to hang like wispy strips in front of the mountains, with bulky clouds high above, and heavy mist floating near the peaks.

We had run out of shops and covered spaces so we felt lucky to come across a covered ferry wharf with a women's toilet. So we had nearly all the amenities of a normal cafe, and had fortunately bought a supermarket salad. Three times, ferries interrupted our lunch, thinking, as one would, that we were potential passengers, and not clientele of a most unique restaurant.

The Camino wanders from the hills onto the main road, then when the terrain is suitable, it sneaks back into the bush and up into its real home. At one stage we came up a steep slippery path, crossed a busy road, and found the sneaky path looking dangerously wet. So we stuck to the main road, sometimes with footpath, sometimes without, and set up a plan to get through the pathless parts and through the very short tunnels without danger. Eventually we arrived at our fourteenth sleep spot in a huge beautiful house right on the lake. This is where we will meet up with our Italian friend from Zurich who is on a local bus coming down to join us and clear his mind of his busy work week in Dubai.

My foot was getting very painful from the steep downhill jogs that I do, so the pharmacist gave me a pad that ties to your toe to stop it slipping. It was brilliant, and now so is my foot and I can jog pain-free downhill again.

Adaptation is sorely underestimated



### *Unusual Dining*

*It pulled in as we sat to eat our bread  
It was for us alone, but we weren't going,  
Was raining as we spied this little shed  
To gain a ride we simply were not showing.  
Another came but rang its little bell  
We shook our heads, the ferry took on speed,  
From far away we gave a pleading yell  
This message did the captain clearly read.  
We've sheltered in some quite unusual places  
In bus stops where the buses never come,  
In churches where you don't see many faces  
In local parks when shelters there are some.  
So when it rains we don't have a regret  
It's taken us to rooms we won't forget.*

## Day 15 - Merligan to Thun

Probably the earliest European dinner ever, at 1730, in this magnificent mansion run by a friendly, interesting and engaging Lutheran minister. There were no formalities as he launched into whatever topic was on his mind at that moment. I informed this larger than life man that we are expecting our friend from Zurich so he booked us into a four-bed cottage nearby, and said that he would keep dinner aside for our Italian friend.

When I welcomed Ermanno after he arrived by bus (stop was right outside our new home), we kissed and hugged then took him to our dining room. They had kept some minestrone (just happened to be his favourite dish) for him, so Corrie and I kept him company as he ate much closer to the preferred European dinner time. He and the minister energised each other with their flair and knowledge, spending time solving many of the world's problems over dinner.

After dinner we spent time in a leather chaired lounge room looking over a Swiss lake, and chatting briefly to some guests before we left for our monasterial cottage by the lake. We had the best four-bed dormitory in Europe I'm sure, with an old heavy door leading into this self contained vine covered hideaway. We had a lot to talk about: the very different culture of Saudi Arabia and the very westernised Dubai (where he had just been); the Italian path where we had met last year; and our common love of walking.

Breakfast was in the big house and we were entertained once again by our host and our friend's discussion on Swiss society. The dining room was huge, our host was expansive in many ways, the view was vast and our friend, a modest extrovert. The whole experience was an adventure in itself and a wonderful Swiss experience. The charming housekeeper gave us a parting present before we set off on our path which was right outside our ancient front door, so no need to search or ask, for directions.

Our shoes were dried with my learnt camino technique of newspaper stuffing. So they were ready to take us into this dark, mostly branchless tall-tree wonderland, with brown-leaf paths, deep canyons, small waterfalls and mossy rocks. We walked past tall sheer rock faces above and below. They were a mixture of stones and loose soil so the evidence of recent collapses was regularly evident. Just at the right time we came across a viewing/eating area with facilities, and had a small snack of our own.

High above a deep ravine we came across a much more steady hanging bridge as we reached yet another high point. These oscillations continued all morning until it was time for our final descent to the canal town of Thun. We ate at a beautiful Pizzeria by the canal, listening to the gushing waters under a peak-roof covered bridge and weir combined. We now have another four-bed room which is huge and light, and my two room mates are intensely testing the sleeping equipment.

Spontaneity does not miss opportunities



### *Me and Her*

*His life had been so lonely for so long  
A childhood that would give him so much grief,  
No sibling fun, parental love - felt wrong  
No where to find a dosage of relief.  
A search for mates did not reveal a friend  
A look for love was immaturely lost,  
An education wasted in the end  
A future without meaning was the cost.  
He turned towards his spirit side at last  
And met her in a class of hungry souls,  
Then one last chance before his dye was cast  
The first of many long awaited goals.  
His love, his fun, his mate, his special wife  
Together they'll explore the trees of life.*

## Day 16 - Thun to Wattenwil

Marcel had brought a very long table and two benches outside this church onto a large area, and had our breakfast laid out for us. I think Ermanno had said it would be a nice place to have it, at seven degrees it wasn't. But the fact that he had actually done it, with our laughing and applauding along the six hundred metre walk to breakfast, brought much needed warmth. Marcel wasn't a minister of the church as such, but someone who did "everything, and nothing".

We had good discussions about Switzerland's society and culture: how expensive it is; huge wages; people of all classes using public transport because it services even the smallest village; and people coming to Switzerland must give their religion and a certain amount of their income goes to it.

Marcel then became a tour guide and walked us through this fascinating town. We walked in the shadow of its castle, over a covered bridge through a park, along the edge of the lake we've been following, past an imposing building with towers on its corners, close to a place where Brahms used to compose. Finally we left Marcel to do 'nothing', because he had spent his time with us doing 'everything'.

Up into the hills once more away from the lake, along a short length of bitumen, and into the forest. It was Sunday, so families were cycling, tandem biking (one with a disabled rider), people walking their dogs (terriers, labradors, three St Bernards, a white sheep dog), and cats.

Ermanno would have to come back to Thun by bus to catch a train to Zurich and back to work in Dubai tomorrow, after a morning's walk with us. It was sad to say goodbye but we will see him (and meet his wife and boys) in Zurich before we head home. It's been great to walk with him and enjoy his company over the past two days, just like the time we walked into Rome together.

We walked along a raised pathway built down the middle of a river dividing it into two, with other streams joining them further downstream. All the way we are conscious of those beautiful white peaks watching over us: the Schwarzhorn, the Eiger, the Monch and the Jungfrau with its step-like slope leading away from the others, and then other lower mountains completing this superb landscape.

Just before we reached home on a small hill at the back of town, a woman called to me because of my Parkinson's sign. I turned to see her husband determined to stand free of his walker. We mimed for a while because he couldn't speak at all and she spoke only German. We worked out that he has had pd for twenty years, goes to a rehab close by and walks as much as he can. How fortunate we are to have some pd symptom relief these days.

After a visit to our local village we returned at late dusk to see the nearly snow-free face of the Eiger, the snowy cliff of the Monch and the fully covered snow side of the Jungfrau with a wisp of cloud hanging in the air, shining alone in the late evening – a sight to behold.

Give your mind a rest from everything and do nothing



### *Zen*

The world is everything to many people  
It's where we spend our time right here on earth,  
Some go beyond and find it in the steeple  
Where they experience another birth.  
It may all come to nothing in the end  
As after death what happens, we're unsure,  
But just in case in heaven there's a friend  
Preparation is important if there's more.  
This man did everything - but unfulfilled  
And nothing - was his one interpretation,  
While everything is 'grist that can be milled'  
He failed to see the richness in creation.  
I know that all of this seems very Zen  
If nothing, everything will happen when.

## Day 17 - Wattenwil to Rueggisberg

Margrit's breakfast setting was exquisite with thin folded cheese, cheese designed like pieces of broccoli, fine rhubarb jam, and other foods decorated with flowers, basil and mint. The four white sentinels joined us for breakfast along with the sun, tempered by the invigorating Swiss chill.

As we ventured out once more, the two ducks quacked and the two dogs barked. Up into the hills once more and, what a hill!. We passed a young woman jogger whom we stopped for directions, and like bike riders, joggers seem to be okay with that. I call them in hearing distance which gives them a chance to slow down and remove their head phones. We passed an older man who had a cutting machine in the cart he was towing with his motor bike and helped him tie it properly, while four tractors had us leaning into the fence, as they take up the whole road.

As we walked, I pondered on our daily hill climbs. While it's tough up the very steep ones, a corner offers a cool breeze. The eagles or falcons are usually up high too, and at times we are also relieved when way up here, because it means we go down for a long time. I went down for a short time when I got my first electric shot some days ago by climbing a fence that was around our back yard. I know most of them are wired to shock the cows into staying, but didn't realise it would be just outside our little yard. I've also unhooked many electrified gates by holding the plastic provided. But this time I was holding two sets of poles and one contacted the fence, yow!

The wonderful Swiss benches have disappeared so we had to succumb to our fallback position - a bus stop, but at least we could stretch out. Our last lap into town was through a patchwork of colours: new crops, older flowering ones, grasses and tilled soil all looked like an eclectic welcoming mat. But we hadn't booked a bed because bed phone numbers, we didn't have.

The kind shop-person sent us to the kloster, then the person we thought was the kloster woman pointed to the track. The kloster man saw this and said he was full, then pointed to town where the front-yard man pointed to the back-yard man (I had a quick look for electric fences), and then the disability driver obviously knew how to talk to someone like me, said it is the person who has things in front that look like they are to go in her garden. He was right.

We are now in a shed across the road (not bad), the shower is down the street half a block in another shed (nice shower), the toilet is back across the main busy village road upstairs in the owners' place (many Swiss leave their doors open 24/7) where the wifi is (scary), and the only place to eat is a short walk to the end of town (worth the walk we are told). While the concerns here are not insurmountable, we really, really don't want to go to the loo tonight.

However, it must be said that our hostess Doris is gorgeous and speaks our language .... and, has done our washing!!!

Sometimes you need a shock to keep you on track



### *The Horse*

No horsemen here to highlight revelations  
No war or famine either, death or fear,  
Four horses only, natures' pure creations  
Were there at peace, a quiet atmosphere.  
Four horses grazing on a fair steep hill  
A silhouette against a pale blue sky,  
But when they run, to see is a great thrill  
They leave the earth and then appear to fly.  
The horse, it does much more for us than most  
Of all the other beasts upon the earth,  
We owe it more than we can ever showest  
We need to fully celebrate its birth.  
Swiss horses are so gentle by their nature  
In Switzerland they have a special stature.

## Day 18 - Rueggisberg to Heitenried

Doris was delightful, her doors were always open to us (literally, many Swiss see no need to lock their doors) so we could simply wander across the road to use her wifi and bathroom. She also did our washing and drying which is a big deal on the track. It can be a real hassle if you have to carry wet clothes, and there is nothing to change into when the day's walk is over.

At breakfast, after her husband had gone to the farm, we had a lovely interchange with her. Andy has a share in a farm with four others and even though there are differences in character, many good things happen. They can take days off and be together or go away, she said it was nearly perfect if you understand and accept that everything has imperfections.

She talked about a lack of understanding about disabilities in Switzerland until recently. This has resulted in much bullying at school and often parents will remove them from the school system. She has a personal interest in this area and does a lot of work with Aspergers where Corrie has a wealth of experience. She also has a book by a Swiss Australian talking about the experience of living with her husband who has this diagnosis.

Soon high up on a mountain, after emerging from a forested Roman path we paused to refresh with the cool breeze. Leni approached us, a small child speaking happily in German. Corrie tried to speak to her in German, while I spoke to her in English. Undaunted, not caring what language we spoke, she took us on a tour of her farm to see her yaks Grossen and Keinen, (of course), then on to her camels and llamas. She would have liked to take us further, but other walkers were arriving and we were caught up in much less interesting conversation. She also had a small business to run.

There were two young German women, two others in their fifties and an older German couple, all off to Fribourg. They had a bed closer to Fribourg so they can dip in to this popular town and then keep going. Accommodation for walkers is rare in this town or very expensive, so tomorrow we will sleep on the other side.

A few more challenging climbs, an engaging rocky river, another Roman path and we arrive at our new home. It is a large Swiss house solely for those who choose to walk from village to village. Klaus looks after all our needs as Jak, his beautiful kelpie-like dog, keeps quiet company with us. Classical music wafts through this spotless pilger herberge as we do our 'daily end of walk things', and get ready for Klaus' hearty pilgrim meal.

While it is dormitory accommodation only, we are the only ones here, so we can move freely throughout our huge home. A beautiful lounge area with its old chairs on a huge Persian type rug, a fire place and adjoining dining room will be hard to leave tomorrow. But unless you have an injury, the walker rule is, you must look elsewhere for your next bed.

The key to trust is having no fear



*The Little Swiss Girl*

She welcomed us outside her little farm  
And pointed to a bench and then her feet,  
Then swept us off the same, with unknown charm  
And took us on a tour, was such a treat.  
Grossen and Kleinen were her special yaks  
Her llamas too were some of her best friends,  
We saw her camels further down the track  
Back to the farm to where the tour now ends.  
This six year old mature beyond her years  
Had goods to sell but did not her case press,  
No purchases led not this girl to tears  
Instead she waved, no anger to confess.  
To meet this little girl just made our day  
I hope they give her time to have some play.

## Day 19 - Heitenried to Fribourg/Freiberg

Jacques the dog sat on my foot, leaned up against my leg (as Swiss dogs do), and kept his eyes focussed on the front door. His dad, the retired psychologist owner, was preparing a tasty potato dish with salad and spicy meat balls just for us. Soon, Jacques' focussed front door opened and in came Frieda. Not as loud as the music but just as passionate.

All memory of Jacques' imagined love for me vanished as this was his mum for whom he had been waiting. She welcomed us, served us aperitifs and we chatted about walking. The five of us then prepared for dinner and an enjoyable discussion began, accompanied by Brahms and others.

A final comment on Jacques. He is highly trained. A quiet word from his mum and he drops the ball, shakes hands, sits, and is very respectful to strangers, treating them as he would his owners. Is Jacques unique here? No, Frieda told us that all owners have to receive training before they are allowed to purchase a dog, so I imagine what follows is that all dogs must be trained.

Frieda is a nutritionist at a local hospital and told us about her struggles trying to change people's life-long dietary habits. Swiss cheese soon found its way into the conversation with its high 'omega 3' content, which comes from the cows being taken to the mountains as soon as the snow has melted, to eat the once hidden omega 3 grass. Part of the secret may be that the grass is 'mown' just before the snow comes. But the grass is cut for another reason, to stop major avalanches. If the grass is long, the snow has nothing to grasp and simply slides off the long grass when it is heavy enough.

Now we understand what our goat herder friend meant when she said she was about to take the goats across the valley and higher up the mountain to make the best cheese. I found it interesting to note that the process used to make this great cheese, also prevents avalanches! We hugged Frieda goodbye and wished her well on her next walk across the distant mountain range that she pointed to from the long balcony of their home.

In the morning we had our special omega 3 and set out into a 't-shirt day'. A gorgeous walk through fields of dwindling grass that have been slowly transformed into a range of lush crops. Through cool forests we walked, past moss-covered rocks and finally on to wide open fields on our way to the ancient town of Fribourg/Freiberg (German/French signage everywhere). We caught up with our two German friends, had our usual photo shoot, talked about walks in their Bavarian forest, and left them in the shade of a Swiss forest.

We're now in Freiberg in a hotel, because our normal lodgings are all booked out. We have the opportunity to re-visit our French studies, but don't have our usual interesting company. What we do have, however, is our first double bed in a long time. Oo-la-la!!

When you rest, rest well



### *The Swiss*

The Swiss are highly trained in many ways  
It shows as you traverse their ordered land,  
It follows just as nights turn into days  
A very unique one and only brand.  
They never cross the road against the lights  
And look at you intensely as they talk,  
In politics there's little change - no fights  
Their exercise is simple, they just walk.  
To animals they must give high respect  
The owner must be trained to own a hound,  
As with their children there is no regret  
To humans they are permanently bound.  
There is a sense that training leads to order  
It keeps secure relations cross the border.

## Day 20 - Fribourg/Freiberg to Autigny

We left without breakfast today because we were hoping to eat with our Dutch friend ten kilometres down the track. We were also conscious of the fact that he had driven to our meeting-town, so he needed a sleep-in.

Another good walking day with lots of locals taking advantage of it. Today is a holiday in Switzerland so everyone seemed to be out on the town last night in preparation for a long bed rest. So walking through the vast streets of Fribourg was extremely quiet. As we moved once again into the forests and paddocks there were joggers, families walking and cycling with their dogs.

Philip had already eaten when we arrived in the quaint town of Posieux, so Corrie and I had our coffee and croissant (in the French part now), and chatted with our friend about families, food and fair weather.

Onto the path once more but with too little concentration following familiar signs, it didn't feel right. We came to an intersection but the sign was a little different, so we wandered down the 'no-sign path' looking for the symbol we wanted. Three dogs charged out of a shed but luckily a woman and her daughter came out of their home at the same time. We hadn't realised it was a road to their house so they directed us down another path.

Still unhappy we hailed a cyclist who skidded down the slope, but being a cyclist he was obliging and sent us back up a very steep hill. I felt bad, apologised to my team members and went back to town, found the right sign and off we went the right way. There is nothing worse than to walk unnecessary kilometres especially when there is a long way to go and it is our fault, but thankfully for our friend, it was short for him.

Coming down a path I heard some beautiful singing. I entered this pretty little church where a Swiss family of six were singing on their own. It was lovely, and timely, as we were due for a rest, and to be entertained at the same time was a bonus. We walked over the first ancient (12th century) bridge we had seen in Switzerland, (which has some stories to tell I imagine), drank freezing water from a fountain, followed a small noisy creek, crossed open fields, then home.

Celine was looking after her mums b&b. She was a delight and showed us our room where Philip's bed was erected in the dining area. It was perfect. Philip and I then went looking for lunch in this 'one shop town' but had forgotten it was a holiday, alas, no food. By chance, a young woman was putting petrol in her car, saw us, and asked us what we were doing, and could she help.

I asked her if she had any food, and that I had money. She said she did have food but would not accept payment. She told us to wait and she'd be back in five minutes, and, she was. She had driven home and brought back fruit, bread, meat, cheese and yoghurt. We thanked our benevolent new friend Pamela and went back to Celine's place for an unexpected banquet.

When you are starved of options, be hungry for new ideas



### *The Food Fairy*

What makes it so that some will help, some won't,  
Is it the person or just circumstances?  
Maybe some history, why they do or don't  
Increases or decreases random chances.  
They're in some haste, appointment they must keep  
Did you ask, or was it their decision,  
Or were they bitten, reasons may be deep  
Could they be left too open to derision?  
She stopped her car to fill up with some gas  
I asked her if there was a place to eat,  
She said that she had food at home, this lass  
Returned with goods aplenty, such a treat.  
No issues, history, to erode her trust  
Part of her DNA, told her, she must.

## Day 21 - Autigny to Moudon

A long day's walking today and now seeing a few more walkers. We met our first Australian, a woman from Sydney, and had a quick 'local Australian geography' and 'what do you do' chat. She was married to a Swiss and finding it difficult living away from home (which we did not have time to investigate). Behind her was a German who intrigued us with his novel way to travel to Spain by wheeling his bike with his backpack on the seat. I imagine this was temporary, and only until his backpack had recovered.

We passed through the special hilltop village of Romont. Making sure we got the directions right, I asked a young couple and others to first confirm, and set out again. Another hilltop village run by two kids with water pistols and an older woman sitting in an otherwise isolated square. Maybe there were other residents but the heat had probably convinced them to stay indoors. I was very hot and asked the boys to spray me. It took a lot of convincing but reluctantly, then happily, they let loose, the cool water bringing my mind and body abruptly back to life. In the meantime the one chair in the square beckoned us for a rest, and a front seat (only seat) viewing of the fountain kids performing their wild, enthusiastic and refreshing fountain frolic.

We had soon moved on refreshed and invigorated, when resting yet again in yet another Swiss chair, the Swiss couple who had given me earlier directions, walked past. She stopped to talk as we were catching our breath in a shady oasis. There was an instant rapport between us so we walked the last five kilometres with them and their dog. Kristof was in the national gymnastics team and now, ten years later, manages an organisation where he is in charge of distributing funds from the government to sixty four different sports groups. Most of the money comes from people buying lotto tickets in a government lottery.

Riccarda was also a professional athlete and now works with the premier train (engines and carriages) builders, so after all these years, still training - sorry! We talked about their love for their work, relationships, and their dog who is also a reliable clock. She knows when meal times are supposed to be and gets very demanding very close to those all important times. It looks like this dog is also highly trained and has decided to take good advantage of it.

We arrived at the end of a long hot track and they invited us for some drinks at a local hotel. Fortunately it was the end of our day's walk and I was able to have two of the most satisfying beers of my life. They were a lovely couple and by the second drink we were having a lot of fun and enjoying interesting discussions. We gave them Swiss kisses and look forward to maybe catching up tomorrow. I was chuffed by the fact that I could keep up with two professional gymnasts, but I later found out that when you train at that level you are bound to get injured. Sadly for my ego they were carrying old and chronic sports injuries.

Just one individual can change everything



## Water

A fountain is a blessing when you're walking  
The water's simply gold, when you've a thirst,  
A place to hang around and do some talking  
With other tasks to do, this is the first.  
It's where the local villagers hang out  
And information can be easily sought,  
To fill your empty bottles, save a drought  
Much cheaper too, than water that you bought.  
But there are times the water can't be drunk  
Or water is not running from the tap,  
If no-one's home your thirst may then be sunk  
You took too little, thus fell in the trap.  
If less you take just for a lighter trip  
Make sure you drink your water, sip by sip.

## Day 22 - Moudon to Lausanne

People were everywhere in the streets of this old Swiss village. It's Saturday, market day and all ages are setting up stalls from the valley of the village, winding up like a stretched 's' and then flattening out for some distance at the top. We had a very long day ahead so with regret, we left it to others to enjoy and indulge in the delights of the local economy.

An older couple were moving out and we know our Swiss friends are sleeping in, so little movement on the track. But not for long. Through forests, across creeks, we saw a dozen people ahead climbing slowly up a steep narrow track. We passed two struggling Swiss women and then saw Marcel, the large 'table and chair breakfast man' from Thun. With him were a dozen disabled adults and children, quietly and independently walking under his laissez-faire guidance. We hugged, chatted for a very short time (it was an exhaustive and breath-taking hill) and continued on.

On top of a hill is where we usually look for a chair to fix shoes, have a drink, remove our pack etc. And there were lots of chairs, but they were availing themselves to about a dozen walkers. This was a long weekend holiday so most of these people were walking for a few days only. I continued on and after 100 metres there were three chairs and a table, but not for the public. Luckily, this pleasant 'chairs and table owner', and also boss of the ceramics shop behind, was happy to have walkers in his back yard, even though we weren't customers.

Corrie and Philip soon caught up. They walk up hills more casually than I do. I walk up fast because, and I've said it before, I can, and if I don't, my muscles become too relaxed, I lose momentum and then really struggle. Corrie has been doing the fast walking program with me and is finding that if she walks slowly (mainly on the flat for her), she, like me, also loses energy. So, because I am in the lead, I am the one who finds at least, a good shady view, and at the most, a seat. On this occasion we got both.

What a welcome surprise to come across our two young Swiss athlete friends, who were willing to fall back a little to chat. So we walked together for a few kilometres then left them behind at a cool spot where they will have lunch. It was a water fountain with a chair, a view, and shade, just about an ideal place to have a food break. Earlier on we had taken photos for a very special memory of a lovely Swiss chance meeting, which we will treasure.

Soon after, I suffered great pain in my left foot that nearly stopped me ten kilometres from home. This was the first time in all our walks I thought we were in trouble. It wasn't my lack of cartilage or a bruise close by, it seemed more probably a large arthritis spike. So at last a dip into our vast drug bag for anti inflammatories and pain killers. After lunch and more walking, the drugs took hold and we made it to our home looking over the cathedral and the old town of Lausanne.

Don't focus on just one solution, there are always others



### Where are We

When looking for directions on the track  
I tend to ask a person I might like,  
No matter if or not they wear a pack  
A joyous interaction you may strike.  
A local who might know a hidden alley  
A shop keeper with mysteries to sell,  
Someone who knows the mountains and the vales  
May be a walker with a tale to tell.  
This time it was a couple who were Swiss  
We walked and talked with them along the way,  
A chance encounter we would hate to miss  
Two gymnasts who gave balance to our day.  
Each day our focus mainly is on walking  
But do not underestimate the talking.

## Day 23 - Lausanne to Villeneuve

We walked two big days with the big two metre Dutchman because the next day, today, we could relax as we cross Lake Geneva in a very crowded boat. It was strange to not be walking and it felt like a day off until we got to our morning destination, Vevey. A beautiful town on the lake, it has the one of the biggest market places in Europe, second only to Lisbon, where the winegrowers festival is held once in every generation, while the huge weekly markets attract thousands of customers and onlookers. Vevey is also where Charlie Chaplin lived his final years, probably eating the famous Nestle chocolate where it was invented by Daniel Peter and Henri Nestle, to the world's delight.

The young girl in the tourist office had little knowledge of the Camino until we arrived. Now she knows that the Via Jakobsweg that we've been on until today, joins the Via Francigena at her home town of Vevey. We walked the Italian section of this Camino last year. While we leave the Via Jakobsweg to now join the Via Francigena, the Via Jakobsweg itself continues on into France joining the Camino Frances at the Pyrenees, which then continues to Santiago de Compostela near the Portuguese border. She also now knows that the Via Francigena starts in Canterbury in England, travels through France past where we are now, and then ends in ancient Rome. It's a great feeling to add to the knowledge of, and even excite, locals, about special parts of their own backyard.

So now we have turned left (south), meaning the Alps are in front of us now, and no longer beside us, and they will get closer every day until we are soon surrounded by them. This will take us through the Grand St Bernhard Pass which is usually closed to walkers until mid-June because of the snow and ice, but the sun has been hot recently and we are hoping that we can walk the full distance to its glacial summit. You can still cross the Alps sooner but you will then need to use the road as well. Then it will be into Italy and through the Aosta valley, just north of where we started our walk last year.

Our walk today mostly followed Lake Geneva around its eastern end. Large grey rocks could have been the sun-baking chairs, while gravel stones were the sands of the shore, so not a lot of choice about where to be trying for a tan, and more like frying in a pan. While a few people swam, a couple of people were in small boats, many others picnicked on beautiful grassy areas, while the more fitter, sportier ones, made good use of a beach-ball court. In the background stood the Alps so it was a special treat for Philip who had not so far seen the mountains close up. Tomorrow we will get even closer still, and he will finally be able to authenticate his Swiss walk for his lovely daughters, with mountain photos and names, and maybe inspiring them to walk there with him one day.

I am writing this in a one street village with a huge forested hill at each end, quite a picture.

Your destination is only limited by your mind



### Our Six Caminos

Camino Frances across Spain this one was first  
With so many people it felt like a huge migration,  
The Chemin de la Puy increased our walking thirst  
We walked with less, south of the French nation.  
The second half then of the Via Francigena  
From the Alps with few to the ancient city of Rome,  
Via Jakobsweg with hardly a soul so far  
Swiss walk was great but we were mostly alone.  
Just now returned from Via Francigena two  
We walked with ghosts across the north of France,  
The Portuguese Way the next that we will do  
Will have much folk and the Fado we will dance.  
But Switzerland is still our focus yet  
And we have friends we still have not re-met.

## Day 24 - Villeneuve to St Maurice

Into a long valley with mountains on all sides, snow strips on the peaks, and down a little, the previously cut 'avalanche-stopping' grasses now glistening, after the recently vacated snow dosed up with its omega 3 fatty acids. The mountains are coming closer each step as we start to recognise their intimate shapes, ever-changing designs, and winter-shedding clothing. Towards them we walked, along a one kilometre wide valley on a narrow bitumen 'two cars an hour road', between flat grassy paddocks and slightly sloping vineyards.

Signs for the track are now hiding behind trees that have reached out in front as though their crooked arms did not want us on their sacred path, so we needed to be vigilant at every corner. No maps in our packs for this section so we have to ask a local before we leave, to not only get a sense of the landform, but to plan our walking distances for the next day.

Today was especially flat and the mountains high enough to keep the morning heat away. We are now seeing mountains high enough to have a name. The first one is Les Dents du Midi. As the name implies, the four peaks looked like 'not so well looked after teeth', with a generous amount of snow (unused toothpaste) that is slowly surrendering to the summer sun.

A river tumbled along between high banks (built as walkways and narrow roadways), as we bathed in their cloudy froth and tumbling sounds. It was curious to see this cloudy aqua, mix in with the eroded dirt-filled water of the raucous Rhône. This was a new experience, as the previous smaller rivers were not shy in displaying their clear bottoms.

The mountains are now closing in more but it is early afternoon so neither they or the tree lined walkways could diminish an early summer sun. Lots of bikers passed us but we saw only two walkers, (a mother and guitar-carrying daughter) to whom we talked and joked. In the villages the 'bonjours' are prolific as though this was an intricate part of being human.

As usual, and primarily because we don't have any directions or lodging material, Philip, who speaks all the Swiss languages, is able to mess with the details when we ask for help. He's been superb, as well as lots of fun, and with an extensive European knowledge pack. Tonight when we reached our Franciscan home, he further helped us by communicating in perfect French with the French speaking monk re our accommodation and other things.

Marcel the monk had cycled much of Europe including the region of the Grand St Bernard Pass. We will be having probably a wet meeting with him in two days' time atop that Pass. He gave us a detailed map of this area which is gold for us. It also contains information of unknown sleeping places, and a phone number if something doesn't work as planned, 144, the number of the local rescue helicopter which we don't plan on using.

New thinking is needed for the inevitable avalanche



### An Avalanche

They cut the grass to stop the avalanche  
For if it's rank the snow will surely slide,  
And decimate the forest branch by branch  
Leaving no places for the birds to hide.  
It also means there's much omega three  
Left in that grass that Swiss know very well,  
Produces cheese while saving every tree  
So vital for the health of every cell.  
There is an avalanche not far away  
Denied by many cause they choose to sleep,  
'Til all that's left - a barren place to pray  
While others, only tears they have to weep.  
There's still a chance to cut that lanky grass  
To stop the planet fading very fast.

## Day 25 - St Maurice to Martigny

This is our last day with Philip, another sad one, but this is an emotion from the same family, a close sibling to happiness. We find it crucial to our well-being to maintain perennial contact with friends, so that the latter sibling remains the more constant close relation in our lives. As usual he has been great company and very easy to walk and stay with. He will catch a train in the morning to his home in Waalre, just south of Eindhoven in Holland, with hope that his daughter has been watering the plants.

Further down this long valley, becoming narrower as the mountains become increasingly intimate, we began a gentle slope up for some time, something we hadn't been doing for the last few days. Now it was important because the climb will become a lot steeper over the next three days. It reminded me of the exercise I perform for both my Parkinsons and Osteoporosis, so important to perform the more gentle pre and post warm up exercises so they become more effective and continue into the higher years.

Then it became a dolphin walk as we entered a mossy forest with its gentle winding, jumping and diving pathway. I could even feel the glee that this most gentle of mammals must feel as it writes its poetic symbols amongst the waves. The many bird sounds joined this natural creativity in this book of poems, it was as though they hadn't seen anyone for a while and so were very excited when they spotted us. I could understand this, for we have seen only one French person travelling from Paris to Rome. Remember, we are now on another camino that travels mostly through France.

Sadly our track didn't cross with a Swiss couple, Martin and Rosmarie, who are great friends of friends of ours, but we have made an email contact so we may catch them at another time in the future. We try as much as possible to go out of our way to make once in a lifetime contacts but when you're walking, sometimes the effort is just too great.

We have now arrived, for our second night in a row, to avail ourselves of church accommodation. It was the gentle Franciscans last night. Tonight it is the Catholics who have taken us below to their windowless, cavelike dungeon with curved ceilings and bare walls. I feel a bit like a pizza in a cold oven, the fire burning up above us and outside. No room/cave key was supplied and we have noticed that Swiss often don't lock their rooms, so it is no great surprise.

The Great St Bernard Pass from Switzerland to Italy starts tomorrow over four challenging days. It has opened surprisingly early so we have been lucky. It means we don't need to look for another track to walk in the meantime. It also means we don't have to pre-book, as most walkers would have planned to reach there mid June at the earliest ... and we just met the man who runs the grand hostel on top of the Pass.

## Friends can make the perfect family



## Swiss Trust

The Swiss don't lock their doors, it's clear to see  
Some even leave the keys in bedroom doors,  
Is it that they fear not robbery?  
Or is it that they all have squeaky floors?  
One night we had no key on the main street  
The shower down the road, it had no lock,  
Our loo across the road, a scary feat  
In landlords home, no key, it was a shock.  
So if this trust accepted by the people  
Is not abused by others in the village,  
Then why is it that they do lock the steeple?  
The Swiss, it seems, don't ever look for pillage.  
So how come that the people go on trusting  
And churches don't, it's maybe why they're rusting?

## Day 26 - Martigny to Orsieres

Breakfast with five priests at our table and six at another was something I could never have imagined. How could this be? Firstly, it is a pilgrimage, although you would never know it from my blog, so churches are very supportive of the pilgrims; it is often where you meet other walkers and gather basic information about beds and food etc; it provides the church and its employees an opportunity to be involved in a fulfilling community project with a universal slant; and pilgrims are assured of a reasonable price, which means it is open to all parts of society. So there you are, I have now confessed.

Philip has caught his train and is looking forward to another type of journey, and this time to Holland in very quick time. The information from our journey will be passed on to him as he will be back here sometime to continue this journey from where he left us.

It's been another dolphin morning, except it will now be a continual gradual to very steep incline. The path has some potentially very dangerous tracks and they will be treated with great respect, some parts have already required us to 'sit and slide', while other parts are safer without poles as we hang on to trees and rocks to stay upright.

Breaking news! Corrie has just been talking to a man outside who walked our path recently and his guide book strongly advised against it, so maybe we need this book? After the very dangerous manoeuvres we have negotiated this morning (even though very short in distance and time), I would only repeat it if I had some ropes to assist us.

But it was so beautiful with those moss-covered rocks, so many and varied, stunning views and small streams either side of a major tumbling frothy river. At one time it seemed a good idea to take the road because our village was in eye sight, but not being certain we continued on. Corrie was a little behind at one stage and could not see it. A wild deer with black stripes leapt up beside me, took one look at me, swivelled and bounced back down the hill (I'm trying not to take it personally).

The mountains have nearly closed in on us, the snow tops at the rear are getting closer, and the weather is said to be unpredictable. So far our entree into the 'Pass' has been pleasant with the odd cloud and raindrop, while food, potable fountains and coffee places have arrived at the right intervals. One lovely woman would not accept payment for the coffee and croissants, because we were walking the Via Francigena, whilst also allowing us to dry our still wet clothes on some vacant customer chairs.

From our windowless dungeon last night to our view from two large window doors tonight, it seems a bit of a 'landscape cultural shock'. Tomorrow it might be a step through the window door into the actual landscape, we're excited.

An instant decision may mean you can't turn back



### Crucial Steps

The track was dust, the slope eighty degrees  
And only metres long it can't be hard,  
Nowhere to grip, no rocks, no logs, no trees  
Took all my energy to be on guard.  
So leaning fully forward not to fall  
With heart racing my lungs without a breath,  
The longest fifteen metres I recall  
A moment where I contemplated death.  
My wife had yet to follow in my wake  
No way, too steep to think of a retrace,  
Could this have been a very big mistake  
The next few moments we will have to face.  
With vast repose she made those precious paces  
In future we'll take heed of dangerous places.

## Day 27 - Orsieres to Bourg-Saint-Pierre

Tumbling water greeted us as this huge stream formed from the myriad of mountain springs and melting snow, gathered in the bushy valley beside us. It met us again in the lower valleys as it pushed against its porous banks, slowly but surely eating into them. Further up, streams joined from both sides noisily adding to these perennial raw sounds.

Streaks of seemingly scattered crooked-finger-flows laced the mountain sides, their outer form not always reflecting their actual size. Looking like superficial trickles in shallow grooves, who knows the depth of the unseen water below, finding its way around its rocky geology and through its multitude of cracks, ending up in those tumbling waters.

It was a long slowly rising slope for the first couple of hours, but enough to add to the sweat from hovering cloud humidity, soon fanned by a cool corner breeze. Wildflowers of yellow, red, pink, white and purple hues coloured the lush green countryside as cattle stood precariously on sharp slopes, deer looked down on us from large rocks and behind trees, while sheep cut intricate paths into almost perpendicular terrain.

What decides the colour of the flowers that spring ushers in on these weeping mountainsides, and are their shapes peculiar to them alone? How do these fragile beauties survive the harshest of elements that nature challenges them with? And how do animals jump from rock to rock with their implausible hoofed grip somehow keeping them upright on steep slippery 'no grip' slopes?

Upward slopes are more common as we climb higher and higher, with fewer and slighter downhills, as we head for the pinnacle of the 'Pass' tomorrow, the Great St Bernard. This is not a 'pass' through a narrow valley but one that snakes up, down and across mountains, the top ridge a mere table top.

The Grand Combin mountain and its surrounds are just about touchable as we move through this impressive mountain range, with its handful of peaks towering down on mountain tops, in themselves, also impressive in stature despite being just over half its size. I talk of this range because it is like the Knight Templar of the Pass, its protecting qualities obvious in its vastness and the constant pure white of its massive peak.

No walkers or bikers anywhere as the track becomes increasingly isolated each day. It doesn't seem to be a place for casual walkers and the longer distance ones do not expect the 'high pass' to be open until mid to late June. This village, our home for the night like many others, appears to have closed down for summer as their busy time has gone with the winter snows.

It is the penultimate day of our walk to the top, the weather is holding, the temperate sun taking away the minor chill, a slight cool breeze reducing the sweat, and each others' company gives us comfort.

Our hidden strengths may be masked by our outer fragilities



### Natures Way

*The tumbling waters were to us a sign  
The path ahead was back in use once more,  
The daisies and their friends starting to shine  
As tonnes of snow continue their spring thaw.  
Some streaks of snow just higher do remain  
Reminders of not very long ago,  
When hiding from their foes, the sun and rain  
Until once more the undefeated snow.  
Our tears clear up the pathways of our mind  
Which starts to flower despite the recent cold,  
And scars remain the evidence we'll find  
Which will return until our life does fold.  
While nature has a method in its madness  
A human has a melancholy sadness.*

## Day 28 - Bourg-St-Pierre to Col du Grand-Saint-Bernard

A continual climb today from around 1400 metres to 2480 metres, through the heart of the Alps, hardly a need for signs anymore. A young Swiss woman with her guitar and two Australians, an eighty year old with his daughter, were the only others walking to the top. A very enthusiastic young Swiss girl skipped by, very excited about these low long slate and stone buildings on the track. She didn't know what they were but was sad that these still strong and beautiful buildings aren't being used, so she imagined what they might have been.

The older man has been walking for twenty years, including a hike around Everest, and three long caminos beginning in France. He has a heart condition but it didn't slow him down as we walked through bare de-snowed hills, others with white patches, evidence of a much thicker layer only two months ago. His daughter had been walking with him for some years and loved to look at the sparse wildflowers and stop at the small bridges being sprayed by rushing waters.

The small streams trickled onto our path, others flooded them slightly, while bigger flows of water escaped under the thick patches of stubborn snow. No villages today, so it was cheese bread rolls prepared at breakfast, and cool stream water just below a roadway that stood in our way. The roadway seemed to act as a border between two different countries as the snow got thicker, and the patches larger. Unexpectedly, our path was blocked by one metre high snow which covered the path indeterminably.

The road was fairly quiet, about 'three cars and motor bikes every five minutes', so the gauntlet wasn't hard to walk, and sometimes fast. It took about twelve stretched 's' bends to reach the top. The snowed-under path was visible now and then, with its black-lined yellow diamond sign making isolated appearances. Like an army exercise, with appropriate warning signals, the last couple of kilometres would have looked suspicious from the air. Walking on the side of oncoming traffic, cautioning each other at corners, crossing sides when the edge ran out, also took our attention away from the landscape spectacle, so photo shoots were taken in the safer moments.

With perfect walking conditions, (the temperature remaining fairly static at around thirteen degrees, for as the day normally gets hotter we were getting cooler with elevation), it was relatively smooth going and t-shirt time the whole way. Even the slight hail and showers that had been hovering in wait for us at the end were okay, and gave us something to maybe embellish at a later competitive occasion.

It's only a small window in our 'four bed' (though just us) room, but a huge view of the Great St Bernard Pass. Just over a week past it was Swiss German, then Swiss French. Tomorrow we will have sadly missed the Italian part of Switzerland as we will go pure Italian and say au revoir to French Switzerland and buongiorno to the real Italy itself.

Don't forget to exercise your brain lest it forgets



## The Saint Bernard

Two Celtic tribes the valley occupied  
The higher pass three Gallic tribes did own,  
Augusta came, the tribes did run and hide  
The vale became Aosta, it was known.  
Napoleon came through that pass as well  
The Austrians his target to defeat,  
These stories will remain an empty shell  
When Saint Bernards reveal their mighty feat.  
Good-natured, loyal, brave and gentle dogs  
The monks best friend they saved so many souls,  
By searching through the unrelenting fogs  
Then giving men an exit through their holes.  
The Great Saint Bernards' lesson to us all  
Is be there, when you see a neighbour fall.

## Day 29 - Col du Grand-Saint-Bernard to Etroubles

It was not far off t-shirt weather yet again, an Alps' chill not able to compete with our brisk walking. Walking down past some over-keen day explorers, who ran past jumping over safety barriers as cars swerved, reminded us once again to take care when it's not our playground. We walked with our two Aussie friends in single file on a busy road as the immediate track was dangerously slippery.

Our friend Lisa, while reflecting and looking back, commented that she was pinching herself to make sure she really was on top of the Grand St Bernard. She had previously walked to Everest base camp, but this experience for some yet unexplained reason, was more profound. Remember, she was also walking with her unstoppable eighty-something father and she had told me that this had made the walk even more special.

We reflected on the small basin in amongst the close peaks like a small icy lake where our home had been for the night. There was a hut (used in summer maybe) that was half buried, even at summer's beginning. Then there was the lake tour track which still can't be seen after nine months. And to be up amongst the clouds lightly massaging the grey white peaks is always exciting for me, because it is a reminder of the great height we have reached.

Corrie and the father walked ahead as Lisa and I were the official photographers of our prospective teams. Both of us take much time and a lot of photos, and therefore oscillate between fast and slow as we take our time-consuming photos then run to catch up. Not far above us, streams of varying size appeared from the mountain peaks, others seemed to just appear from under snow drifts, all joining a major river that followed us along most of our path. So, as photo takers, we also see a lot, missing little.

Early June means some of the Via Francigena upper path down into Italy still has some snow, or streams of water that make the high trails dangerous. So we spent some time on the road, with the many Saturday locals and tourists. A dozen cross country skiers drifted across in front of us, while others began their long walk back to the top. This was a 'cyclist, two cars and four bikes a minute road'. While the former were slow, the motor bikes mostly used the hair pin bends to test their nerve, attempting to kiss the tarmac as they overtook cars in a seeming pursuit of a fast time, or as a ready made substitute for a race track.

This is very Italian to me, though probably just a coincidence as I prepare for life to speed up a bit. Don't get me wrong, no walker could outpace the Swiss, but the Swiss are conservative and things don't change much. Now in Italy, with a new language and another use for our arms, it is downhill (in a good sense) all the way, and other muscles are now in use. Not a long journey today but a savouring one. As official photo person, and Corrie as my regular model, there were plenty of opportunities to take in our stunning surrounds.

When you reach the top remember there is always another mountain to climb



### The Mountain Top

There's nothing like a lake up in the skies  
Eight thousand feet near frozen at that height,  
A place where monks might sit and just be wise  
Where others ponder on this magic sight.  
The bits of snow make pictures on the mountain  
That change so slightly when the sun appears,  
The melted snow, with sun becomes a fountain  
If shaded then, all you will see is tears.  
It's such a feeling when you reach the top  
High amongst the peaks there in the clouds,  
Imagining the stories told by Aesop  
Where secrets seem to huddle in a shroud.  
We'll rest one night in quiet contemplation  
As the sage still sits in peaceful meditation.

## Day 30 - Etroubles to Aosta

The long gentle downhill slopes continue along shady pine-needle paths that provide a natural cushion for our weary soles. Our pace is closely mimicked by a small canal, streamed off to follow similar contours to ours but with a higher purpose. This gentle decline allows for a metre wide and deep waterway to feed the thirsty pastures below, and remains true to us on our small path for many kilometres.

Eventually we dip down from our five hundred metre high valley edge through these watered pastures, their towering irrigation sprays offering us a brief cooling period beyond our shady path. We meet up with our Aussie friends nursing muscle soreness from the journey down the mountain peak, then chat briefly to a Belgian couple who have also stopped for a coffee break. I like to take the 'talking opportunities' whenever I see someone, mainly because you never know what new adventure may appear.

Apart from that, our social time consisted of confirming directions for our track and for our coffee and nibbles, alas, Italian croissants have not improved. This is more an observation than a complaint because just to have the chance to stop, rest and refresh is a luxury in itself, and time away from walking here is well earned with the daily hill climbs.

Now down to the valley floor, but with the terrain still falling away gradually, we sense our Aosta home, as a steep rise followed by a deep drop, took us through familiar streets and sights. Mountains still with their bright white peaks close in on us now, as the beautiful town of Aosta sits peacefully in their shared lap. It is still two kilometres of winding tar with intermittent shops and homes bordering its length. We see our favourite restaurant with its two floors, separate eating rooms and joyful busy waiters, with great Italian fare at a fair price.

We venture into the hill-station-type bustling street of Aosta with its large array of cafes and its huge wonderful square where they have new themes often, such as, today's 'chocolates', all types and from all over, and what a sweet reward for our Swiss journey. Soon Corrie gets a whiff of our past lodgings here two years ago, and we're home.

The same receptionist was there, and after discussing our payment taken by our booking site she said: "you owe one euro for city tax". She collapsed with laughter when Corrie said: "can you wait until we go to the bank?" I thought it was good, but not that good.

Our main decision now is, whether we finish where we started last year in the Vercelli rice fields. However, we suspect the summer sun will have its own way. Tomorrow's low temperature will entice us, but we will monitor it. After that there are some other cool parts of Switzerland to explore and some cool friends, so we'll look at it day by day.

A theme gives meaning to your art



## The Descent

This tribe of two began the long descent  
By road this time, the track too dangerous,  
Bit scary too, the road, cause cars they went  
At speed sometimes and then also the bus.  
We kept our plan of walking on the left  
I ran ahead when bends I saw were looming,  
We'd stop and wait when options were bereft  
Always with full awareness, not assuming.  
And then there were the tunnels, something else  
A little like an MRI machine,  
It's slippery too as more and more ice melts  
The hairpin bends did also keep us keen.  
Negotiating roads while never pleasant  
Can help to stop your brain from going errant.

## Day 31 - Aosta to Nus

The Aosta valley villages wove into each other on a cloud shaded day. A friendly Frenchman joined us for our first few kilometres beside the grape vines, through the forests and along a variety of paths, as the sun peaked out at us a few short times along our elevated path.

Last year we began our walk on the Via Francigena at the edge of the Aosta valley, and this is where the major part of our walking ends. In Nus, a small friendly village wedged by tall snow streaked mountains, typical of this area, we finish this journey. Now it is time to visit some mountain tops.

It's been a challenging 600 kilometres plus across magnificent Switzerland with its many 'passes', and a respectful crossing of the Great St Bernard Pass into the beautiful Aosta Valley, which has become a special place for us. The hills and mountains at times could not have been steeper. By realising that daily distances would have to be shorter, we were able to reach our goal. The beauty; the helpfulness of others; the perfect weather; the people we walked with; Philip and Ermanno; and the emails, all helped to ease the pain.

With regards to my Parkinson's, there have been some minor changes. Primarily my left leg has lost some movement so I have to consciously move it with more effort. I have found the Nordic walking invaluable with this and the drive they give me, as I challenge anyone on the hills. This must also mean that my arms are still strong and the poles also help to maintain this.

My voice strength goes well, but once again I have to consciously talk at a higher volume, and I do keep up my exercises. Facial expression exercises and consciously changing my expression as I talk, help ensure my look matches my interest, which is always there, but at times not visible to others. The Italian language helps, and as to make myself understood, I really try to express as they do and the reward I get is superb, and it's fun.

Corrie tells me I am engaging with her less, and I therefore need to watch this and try to override my 'at times' self interest and 'off times' with empathy and understanding of others. My posture deteriorates as the length of walking time increases so I continue to be aware of this, and hold my body straighter and keep my stomach core in.

As we finish our alpine camino, Mount Blanc is a fitting next stop, and hopefully the summer sun has provided some openings to explore its surroundings. The roads are open so we look forward to being bussed up into the 'white mountain's' icy home where we can have another, but less strenuous, walk. Then on to the Matterhorn, mostly snow free at the top because it's so sheer. I've been told that to scale the final peak, legs are not so important but strong shoulders are vital to pull yourself up on ropes. Lastly It is the queen, Mount Rigi where we will spend another day walking but to the very top this time.

There's a time to walk and a time to rest



### Dog Tired

It's time to rest from thirty days of walking  
And take time out to simply smell the roses,  
Reflect, review, so much time for talking  
No need to even look beyond our noses.  
We talked of hills that put us to the test  
Of rushing waters melted from the snow,  
The Swiss red chairs put there for us to rest  
And scary slopes that said to us - "Don't go".  
We walked with friends we met on other ways  
And made new friends of others on the track,  
It made for very interesting days  
As we take time to ponder and look back.  
A stunning walk, the Via Jakobi  
This mountain path was what it meant to be.



