

Switzerland by Bicycle ... Are You Crazy?

Switzerland? Are you crazy? The Matterhorn? The Alps? I ain't no Lance Armstrong you know! I can detect a 1% grade in 100 ft of travel. I am always last! Do you hear me? Last!! Still, it sounds kinda cool, and no, I haven't been to Europe, even though I have relatives in Belgium, I haven't been to Europe.

How would we communicate? I don't speak Swiss. I am afraid of heights. "You are a wuss!" she said. Okay! That does it! We're going!

I got on to Google Earth (really cool if you have a newer computer). I went over the route by air, flew by some of the towns, zoomed in on locations and buildings. Then, I wandered off to Baghdad, Budapest ... and got off track. We lucked out by having enough frequent flier miles to pay for the air fare. The trip from MSP to Amsterdam was a bit long, but okay. Amsterdam to Geneva was also okay. Interestingly, the countryside we flew over looked just like here, except sometimes you could see some mountains. No stamps in my passport, no interrogation at the entry ports, (strike that...airports). Huh! The people look just like us, no Heidi costumes anywhere. In fact, I found that if you keep your mouth shut, we look like THEM! Don't speak, and nobody knows where anybody comes from. People in Geneva look like typically



Look! Isn't that Julie Andrews dancing and singing up on the hillside?

poorly dressed Minnesotans, except everyone is skinny. Really! Rarely saw anyone that was on the heavy side. We rode on cobblestone streets in the small towns, but wonderful smooth asphalt in Geneva and larger towns. No bad roads anywhere. Three blocks of Mediterranean Moods on Friday night shows more bad streets than we saw in the entire crossing of Switzerland. Also no junk, no junk cars, no trash about, everything is in super shape. How do they do it? It's a very pretty place. Underground utilities even in the countryside. A bit bizarre to be on a road 20 miles from anything, in the middle of several farm sites, and have a road that has manholes with water running in an underground sewer and a water hydrant on the edge. Electric and gas

underground. Wow!

Our first night's dinner was to the town of Russin to a vineyard and a home to the family that has occupied it continuously since the 1300's. The steepest hill I have ever seen in my life was when we walked up to the wine tasting and hors-d-oeuvres provided by the hostess. (I brought back three bottles of wine). I have just GOT to get the recipes for those things! I am going to claim that that steep hill was the cause of my sore legs for the rest of the trip, and my slowness in riding. Nobody will, or did, buy it, but you know I like to complain.

Day 1 of the trip we ride from Geneva to Chexbres, a total of 74 kilometers. All was easy until outside of Chexbres, I missed the turn, went up a really steep hill I could have avoided, then



The cheese storage building at Gruyere had the most cheese Dan has seen in his life. The building went on outside of the frame forever!



This is on the road to Chexbres. Dan had lost the peloton, so he stopped to take pictures.



Narrow road! Cars (and bikes) could go only one direction at a time.

missed the turn to Chexbres. The climb here was pretty steep, and really long. I was, of course, way behind, and decided to take pictures since I was an hour behind everyone else anyway. Missing the turn, I noticed I was going down hill.....really fast! Fun! At 30+ MPH, I was riding the brake...hard! I had the feeling this was not right, because we were supposed to be on TOP of this hill. OOPS! Down I shot to Vey Vey, the town I was NOT supposed to go to. Let me tell you, the climb back UP that hill, (more than five miles), was a B.....! Then it started to rain! I guess you could say I was tired by the time I got to the hotel at Chexbres. It was then I discovered the next interesting thing about Switzerland, or at least all of the places we stayed at. ALL hotels were at the TOP of some hill at the end of the ride (and I think this is why we got a good rate). ALL of the rooms were UP two or more flights of STAIRS after that. (Room 101 will be on the second or third flight up in most hotels.) OUR room numbers usually started with 500 something.

Okay, yes, it's funny. Funny now, funny then, but I AM telling the truth. You don't want to do this ride if you have to walk with a cane.

That reminds me, I did see a woman with a cane at the castle at Gruyere, and she must have been 80-85 years old, which made me feel like even more of a wimp. You cannot believe how steep it was to get there, and how steep the courtyard was within the walls of the castle. No wonder these people are all thin.

I am not going to bore you with a day to day recount of the hills, the rain, the beautiful vistas, the wonderful people we met, and the great food, and companionship we shared, but will touch on a bit of them. We did ride thru 82 towns, some big, many small ones. Similarity was that all were clean, quaint, many quite pretty. Housing old but in far better shape than 40 year old homes in the states. Lots of flowers, everywhere. Lots of running water. All was crystal clear, except one stream after an all night rain. We rode thru ski destinations, Speiz and Interlakken, (probably others), cow and sheep country. I thought we saw Julie Andrews singing "The Hills Are Alive..." more than once, but that could have been my tired legs talking. Lucerne would be a great destination all by itself, and I wrote a memo to John (our leader), that a mid week break to spend a full day in Lucerne would be a wonderful break. Lucerne has the longest wooden covered bridge in Europe, hanging with flowers and inside are paintings



Buses can't turn around too easily. Riding a bike was much more fun!

that go way back in time. Cool restaurants everywhere, and the narrow streets open up on squares every so often, usually with entertainment of some sort taking place in them. Delightful! Here some pictures (from both Dan and Edie – Editor), but go to e-groups to see much more. Should you desire more information, or think you might wish to go next year, contact me or any of the following (we all went), for more information, and possible discount: John Escritt, Heather Gehring, Edie & Harvey Kalweit, Carolyn & Dan Robinson, Jim & Rohanda Victorsen, Berway & Mary Swanstrom. The website is www.bikeswitzerland.com . Dan Robinson



Many hills were almost straight up!



The smiles show this is early in the day before the hard climbing!