

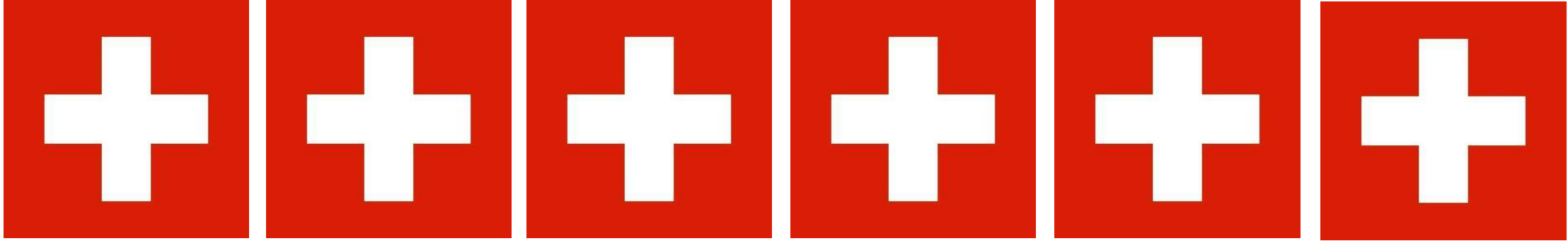


The Alpine Pass Route

Andrew Lievesley

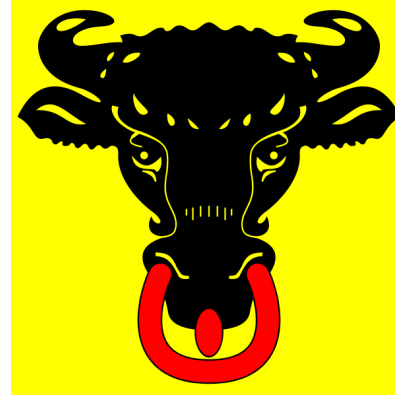
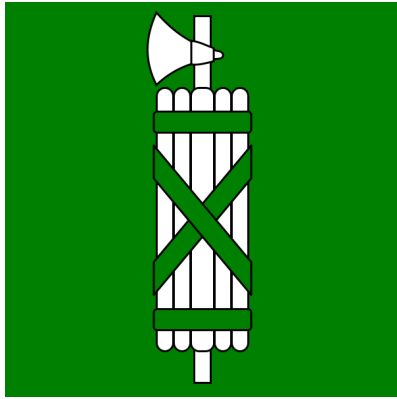
The Alpine Pass Route

Andrew Lievesley



This book is dedicated to Joy, for once again letting me go and play 'All by my own'

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The Alpine Pass Route

The Via Alpina runs from Trieste to Monaco. The Swiss section begins on the Lichtenstein border and ends at Lake Geneva. It is also known as the Alpine Pass Route because it crosses 12 alpine passes. For various reasons, explained in the story I missed out two of them.

The route is approximately 320km long (200 miles). However distance is no reflection of effort, when you can climb up to 1500 meters (5000 feet) in a day. Also the quality and gradient of the path had a marked effect on performance. An average walking day for me was 9 hours.

I unashamedly used cable cars when available and appropriate, as well as the very occasional bus or train, especially if this would take me higher without losing too much distance as the crow flies. The distances and heights I quote are what I actually walked; I did not include the distances and heights for other transport. All this said, I still walked over 85% of the whole route.

The walk was made easier by the excellent guide book by Kev Reynolds. Older than I and clearly fitter than myself, the distance times quoted in his book are for mountain gazelles.





Sargins - Alps Votsiez 19km 638mtrs climb.

For the first four days walking I was joined by my long term walking pal Jimmy. We left our overnight accommodation and walked to the station to buy some lunch. We had not realised it was a public holiday and everywhere was closed; we were very pleased with ourselves when we found an open coffee shop in the next village.

So by 11am we had walked about 3kms; up to our usual relaxed standard. This approach would require some adjustments over the coming days. The day started very wet as we struggled up 400 meters through the trees to the high valley.

After the climb, the rest the day was a pleasant balcony walk along a valley to our accommodation, which was a hotel, cafe and creamery. Accommodation and food was good, unfortunately the place was overrun by house flies. As the journey unfolded I realised the Swiss do not worry about them, but we did.





Alps Votsiez to Elm 18km 1261 mtrs climb.

Foopass was the big event for the day. Looking back it did not seem that tough, but as the guide book said, if you were in any doubt what you were in for, after today you would not be.

Hard climb up, difficult descent, wild flowers, no rain and great views.

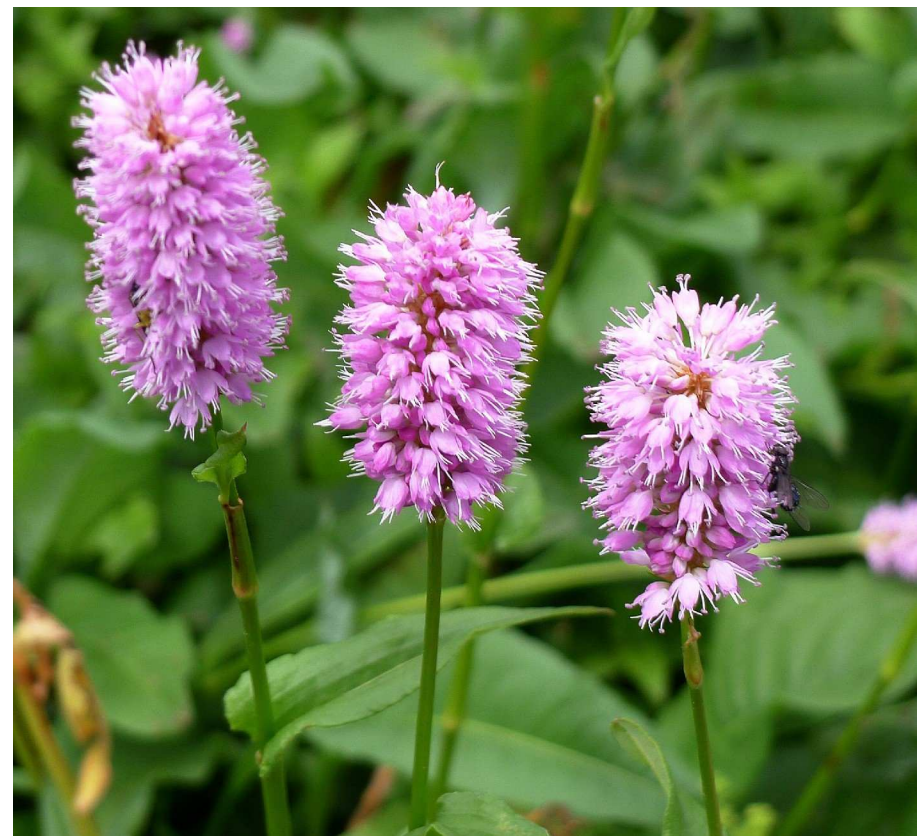




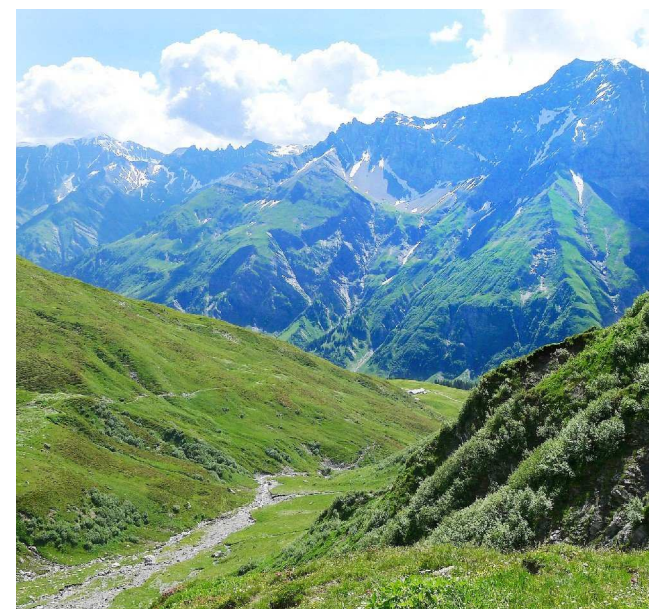










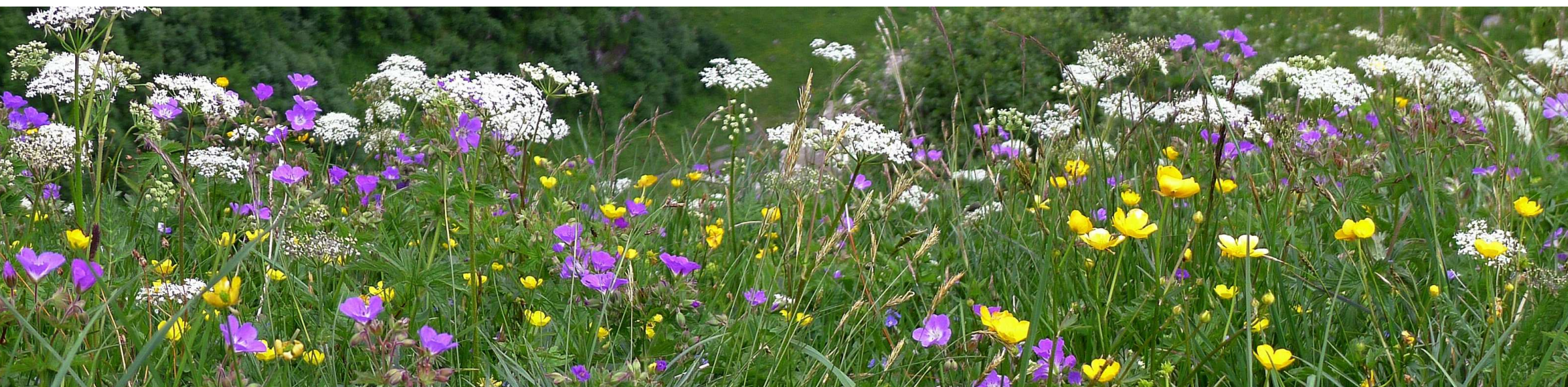


15/6/11 Elm to Braunwald 12km 500mtrs climb.

We discovered a bus that would take 700mtrs off our climb and avoid the boring first 3 hours of the walk. We arrived at a mountain hut that did great coffee served by a delightful lady who put us wise about all things Swiss.

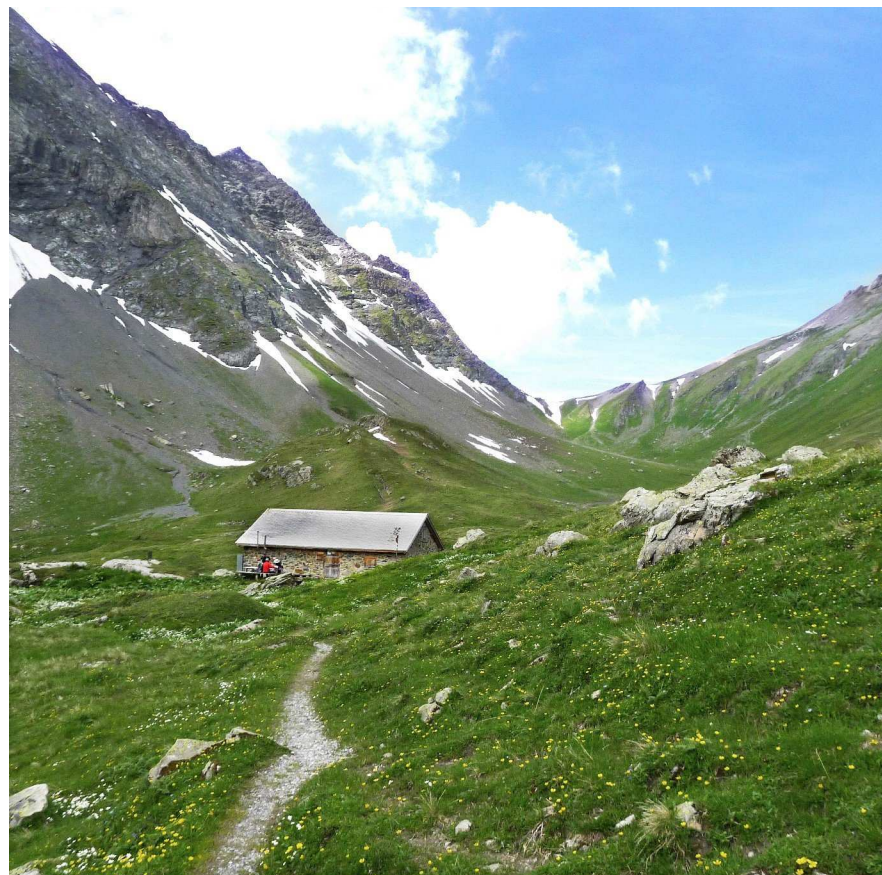
We then climbed over a pass to the Wichlenmatt, an attractive basin high up in the mountains containing a solitary mountain hut (used by the Swiss Army). Outside of the hut we met a Swiss couple who were complaining about the strength of the Swiss Franc... our hearts wept.

After our break we tackled the pass, which was followed by a steep descent on a difficult path. Unfortunately this did for Jim's knee, so on arrival at the valley floor we scrounged a lift from a farmer into Linthal. We then caught the cable car up to Braunwald to give us an easy start the next day.













Looking back onto the Wichlenmatt from the top of the Rechetpass. the person on the left is a Swiss girl who we met at the top of the pass. Incidentally, on many days I hardly met anyone except at the top of passes, which were cold and windy places, so you did not hang around for long.... odd?

Next page.... Going down the other side.









Braunwald to Underboden 12km 124mtrs climb - then by train and cable car to **Brutsi**.

The guide book said if this section was going to be done in its entirety without using transport it would have to be split. Jim needed to be in Altdorf the next day to start his journey home. So the plan was I would walk to the pass while Jim rested his knee and then joined me there. We would then continue together until the last few kilometres when we would use a bus again. A brilliant plan.

So I set off bright and early along a balcony (as in reasonably flat) walk, lovely morning, sunshine, cafe for coffee in the middle of nowhere etc etc.....Life could not have been better. Then I hit a couple of miles of mud and the biological outpourings of a big heard of cows. This, mixed in with steep assents and descents amongst tree roots, made life miserable. However all my travails melted away when I came to a pasture, the clouds cleared and wow.....just as the guide book said, it looked like the Dolomites.







BRSB			
On Th, 16.06.			
Linthal	de	Time X Pltf. No	
		12:12	R 7746
Ziegelbrücke	ar	12:55	5BC
Ziegelbrücke	de	13:01	a) IR 1776 b)
Thalwil	ar	13:37	6
Thalwil	de	13:45	4 IR 2341 b)
Zug	ar	14:01	4
Zug	de	14:05	3 S2 21243
Altdorf	ar	14:47	2
Duration:		2 h 35 min	
Transfers:		3	
Validity:		daily	
Additional notes: No responsibility accepted for platform detail			

I then walked to the valley floor when Jim phoned me to say the summer buses did not run until next week....bugger. I dived into a cafe and 'mine host' explained that was true but he could organise me a post bus to take me back to Linthal.

This done I met up with Jim at the station. Effectively the only way we could travel the 30km walking distance to Altdorf was by train, well 4 of them actually. So two and a half hours later of very impressive connections by Swiss Rail we arrived at our destination having nearly gone back to Zurich. The time table gives the story away, not only did it work but you are even told the platform number. The bitter pill is, not only are Swiss Railways everything they are cracked up to be, it is the only thing (apart from the Co op own brand lager) that is cheaper than UK.

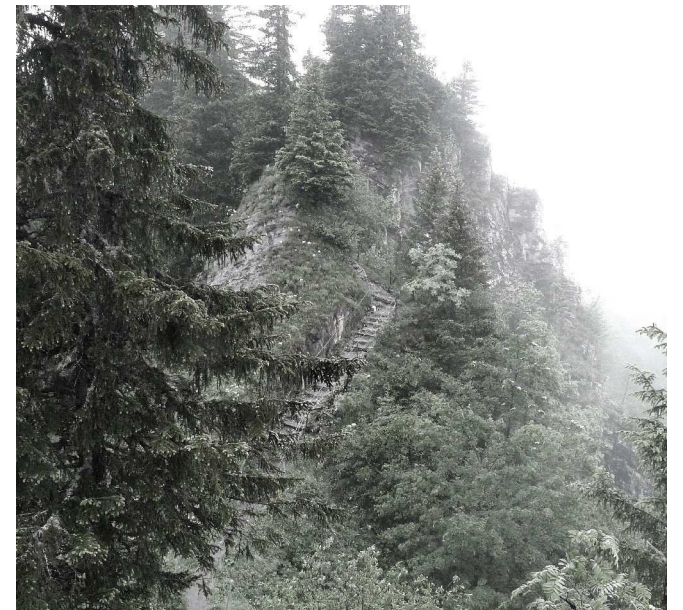
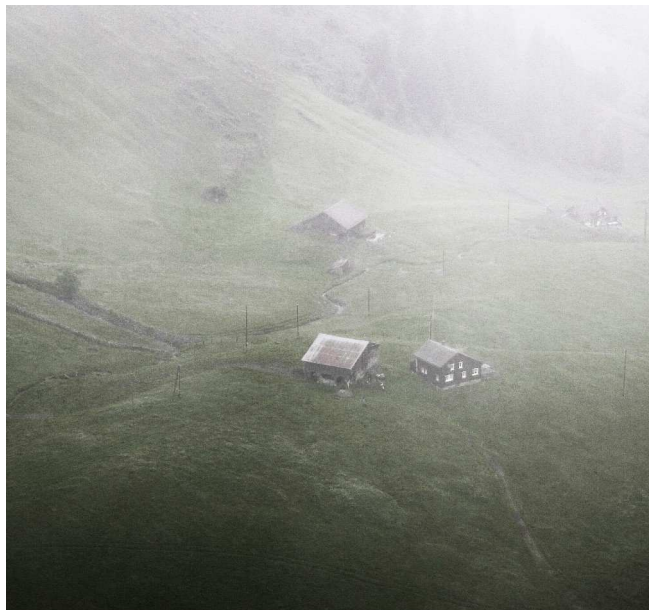
To make sure all the messing about was over on one day, we took the cable car up to Brutsi to knock off 1000 metres for the next day. We stayed at the hotel which was good value for money and great food. On the down side it had started to rain, it was forecast to continue the next morning.

It was a messy day, with no passes climbed, but it was good fun.



The view of Altdorf from the Britsi cable car shows the valley we would have walked down if plan 'A' had worked.





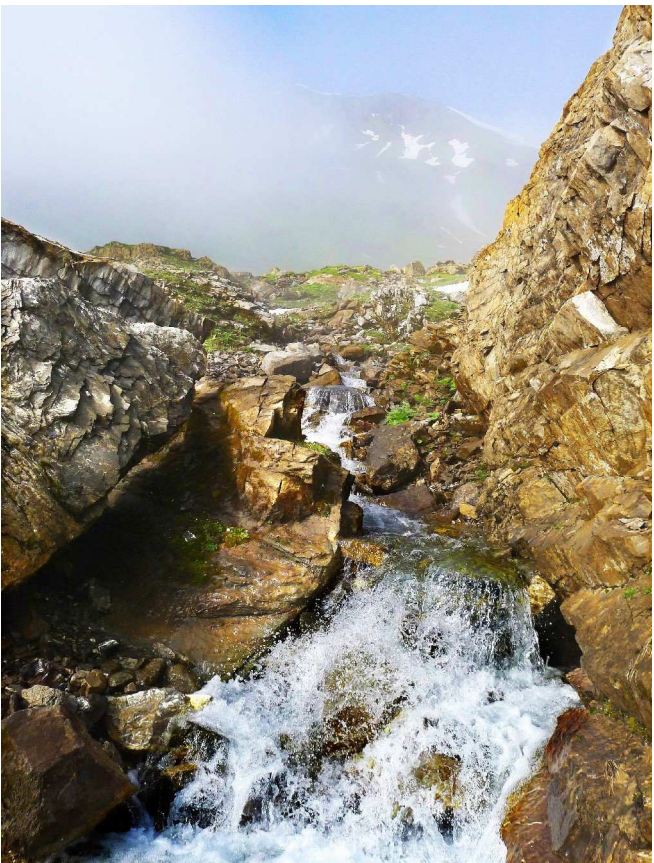
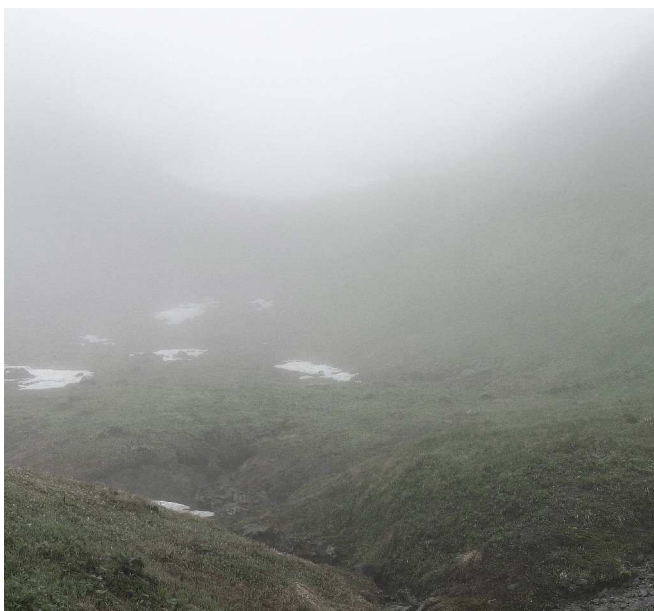
Brutsi to Engleberg 26km 766mts climb

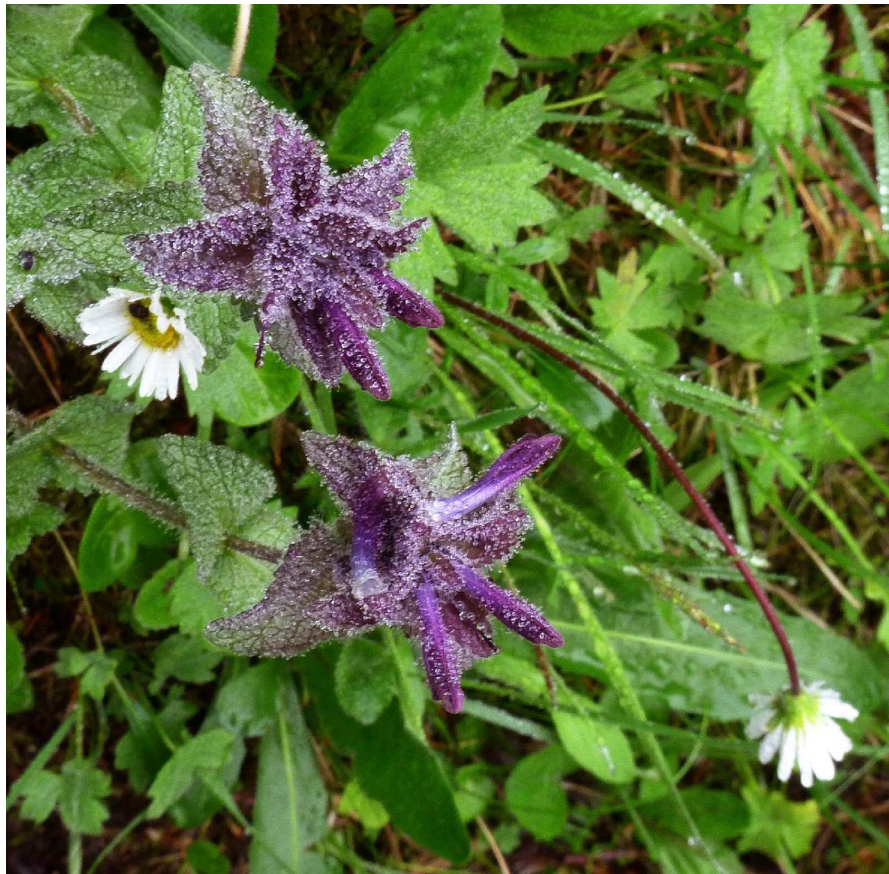
Today was going to be long in distance with a reasonable climb. Also one of my favourite days walking ever. On the down side Jim had to go home, so leaving him asleep I grabbed a quick breakfast and left at 7am.

The rain had stopped but it was a grey day. As I left the hotel it looked grim. Eventually the clouds parted to show little vignettes of view and very subtle bits of scenery. I have down played the saturation on my photographs to replicate the mood I felt.... great fun and a different way of viewing the world. I also had great close up views of the spring flowers which looked so intense in the gloom.

As I walked up to the Surrenenpass I experienced my first snow fields; no big problem as they were on the flat. Just short of the pass I was in the 'zone' doing my photography bit, when the clouds lifted and I had a similar display of mountains as I had experienced the day before. The only difference this time was that I was above the clouds. I sat down and drank in the view, truly a magic moment in my life.

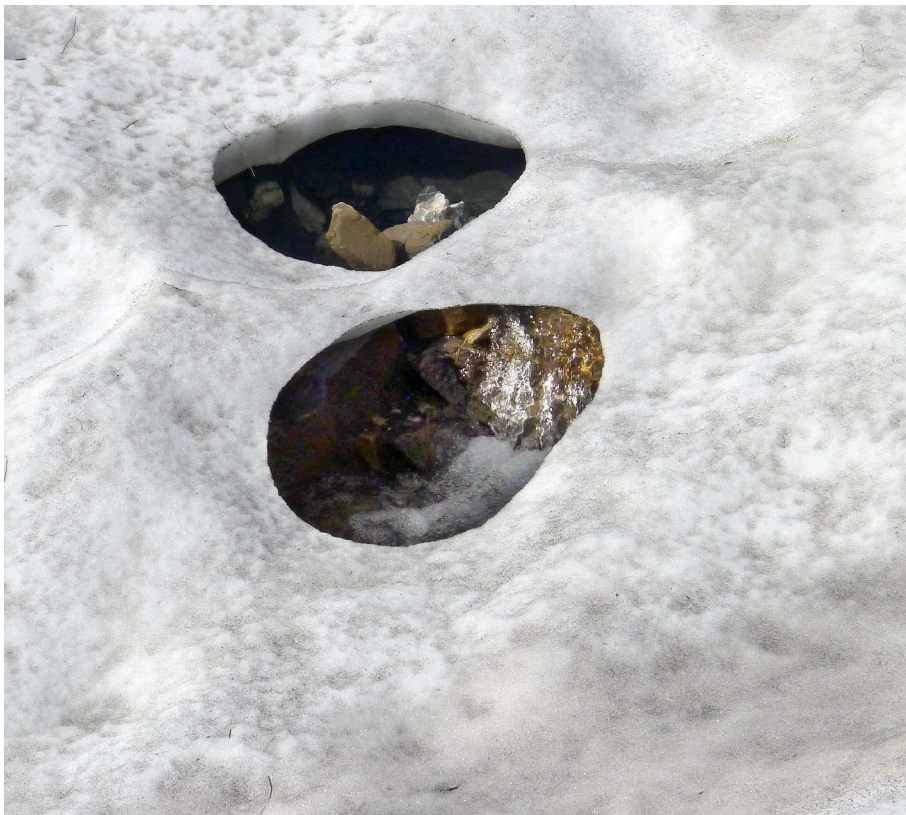














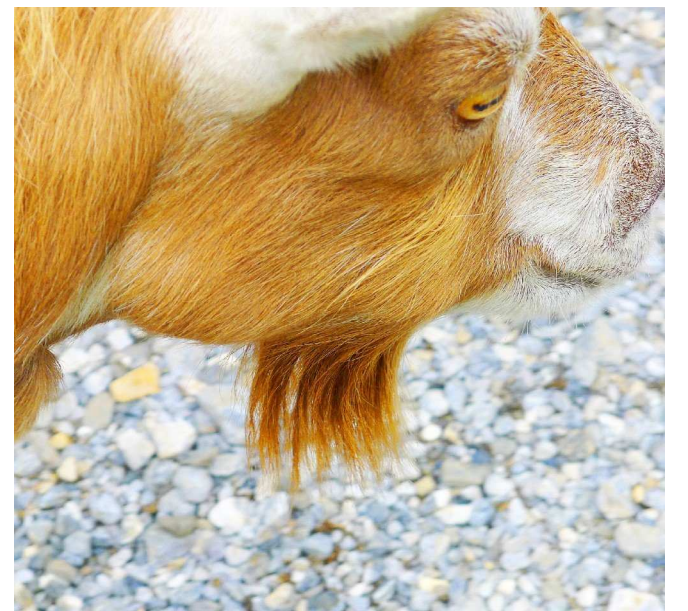


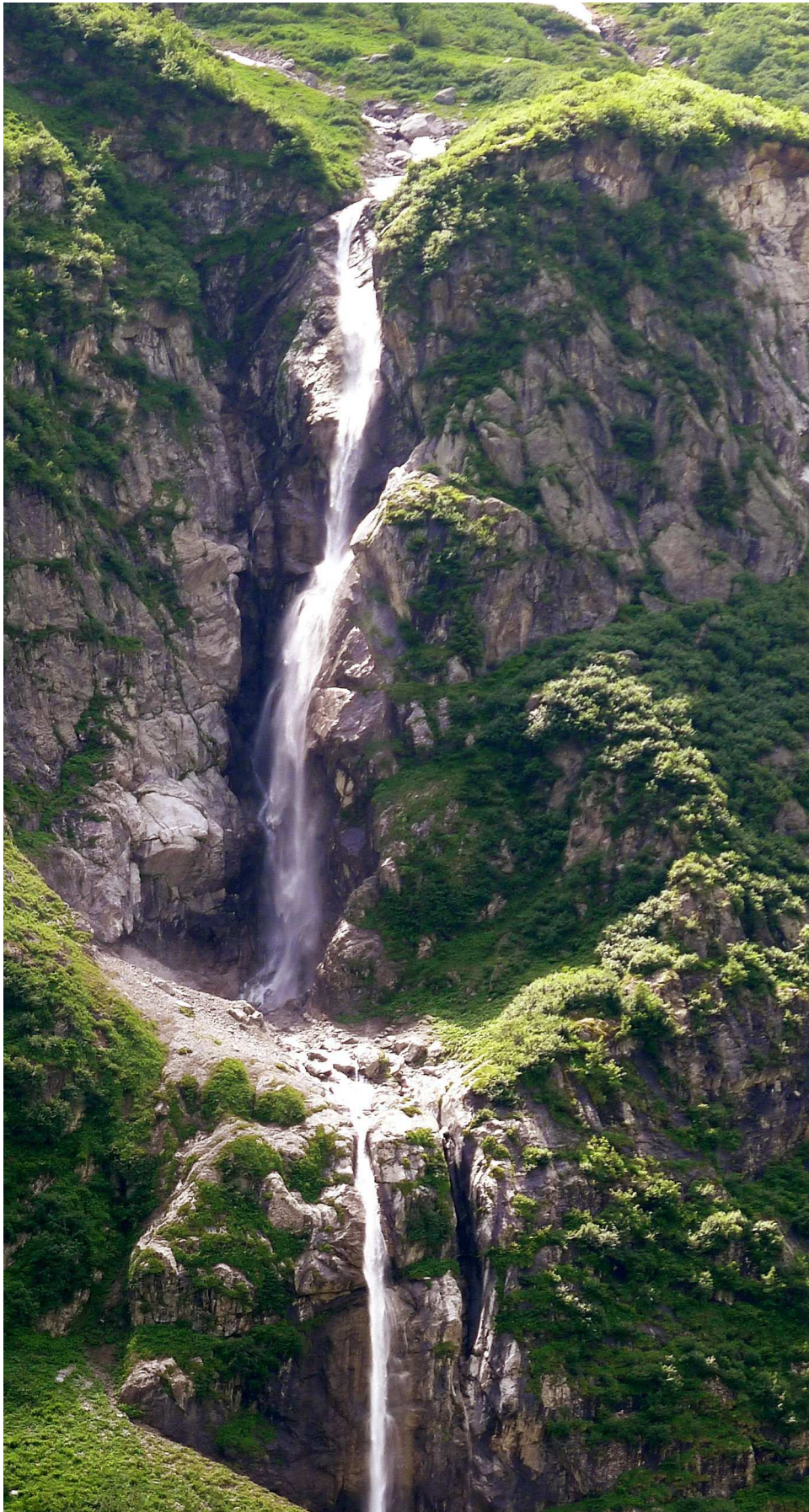
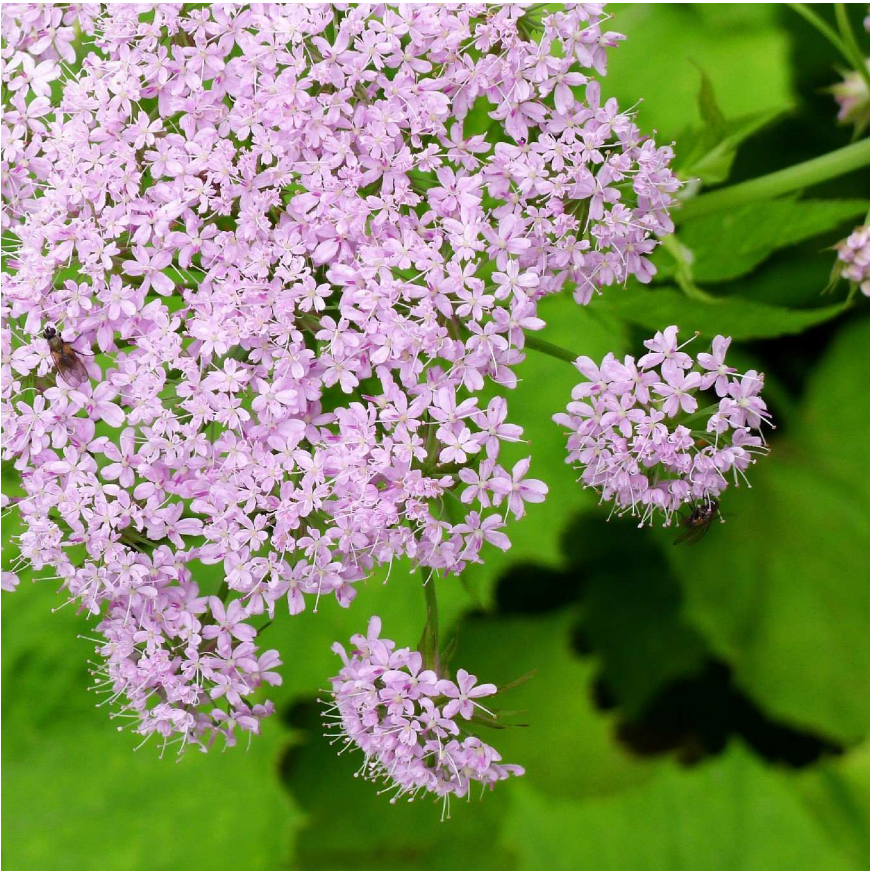
As I went over the pass I was greeted by a sea of cloud, which soon parted and I had a fantastic view.
(see next page) I even found a farm/cafe which had just opened for the first summer's day.













Engleberg to Meringen 26km 0mtrs Climb

You accept that it can't be great weather all the time and today it was wet.... very, very, wet.

However I had a cunning plan....

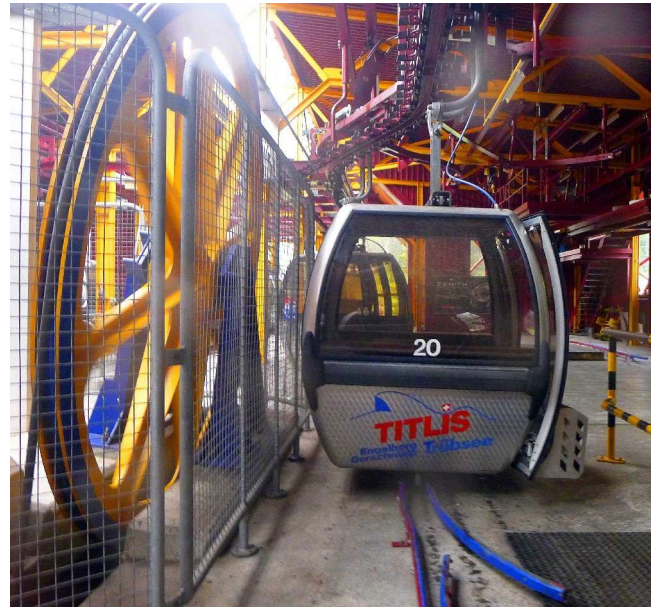
Half a century ago (I was very young) our parents put my brother and I on a coach tour from Lucerne that took us to Engleburg then up the cable cars and chair lift over the Jochpass to Egstlensee .

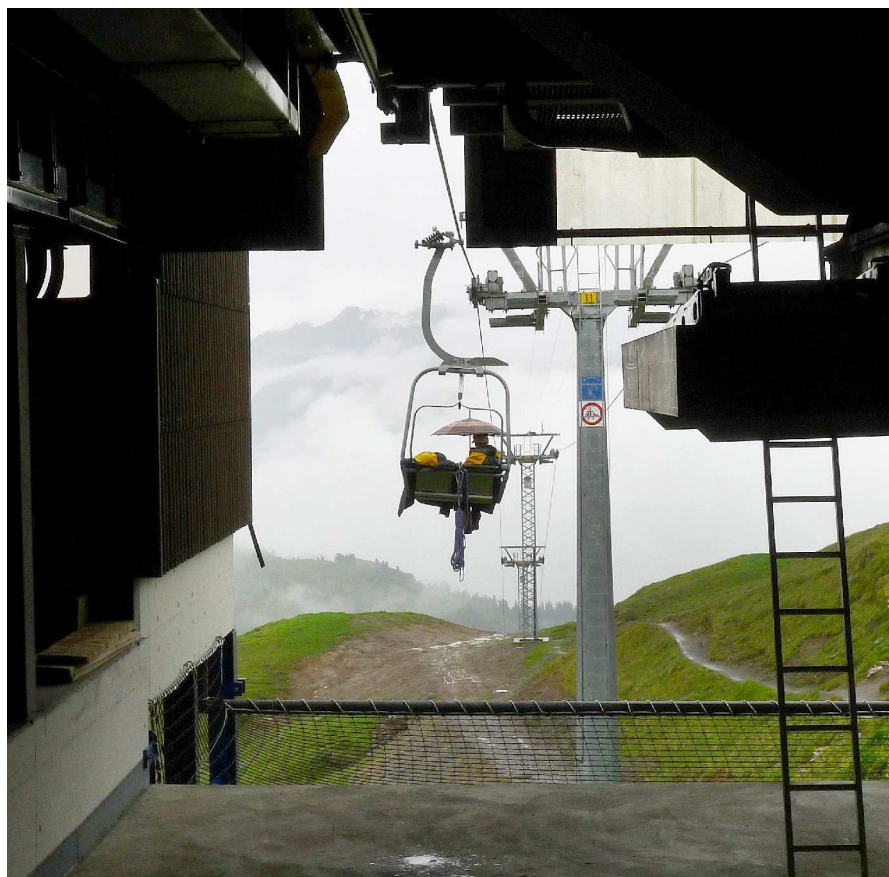
Today I was going to recreate the cable car and chair lift part of the trip with the added feature of an enactment of the rain storm leading too Noah's flood. The good news was I had a lay in bed until 7am and a very big breakfast at my big expensive hotel as I waited for the first cable car of the day.

The trip has three parts, the first being in an enclosed cable car to the Trubsee, a short but wet walk around the lake to a cable chair lift you could enclose (pictures with and without cover on next page).

I then had the pleasure of being the first paying passenger of the summer on the chair lift (no cover but with power shower quantities of rain) down to Egstlensee.

Regrettably they had a technical fault and the operator for the lower station in front of me was enjoying going in and out of the shed. Eventually I squelched my way down to the hotel and had a cup of coffee to recover.





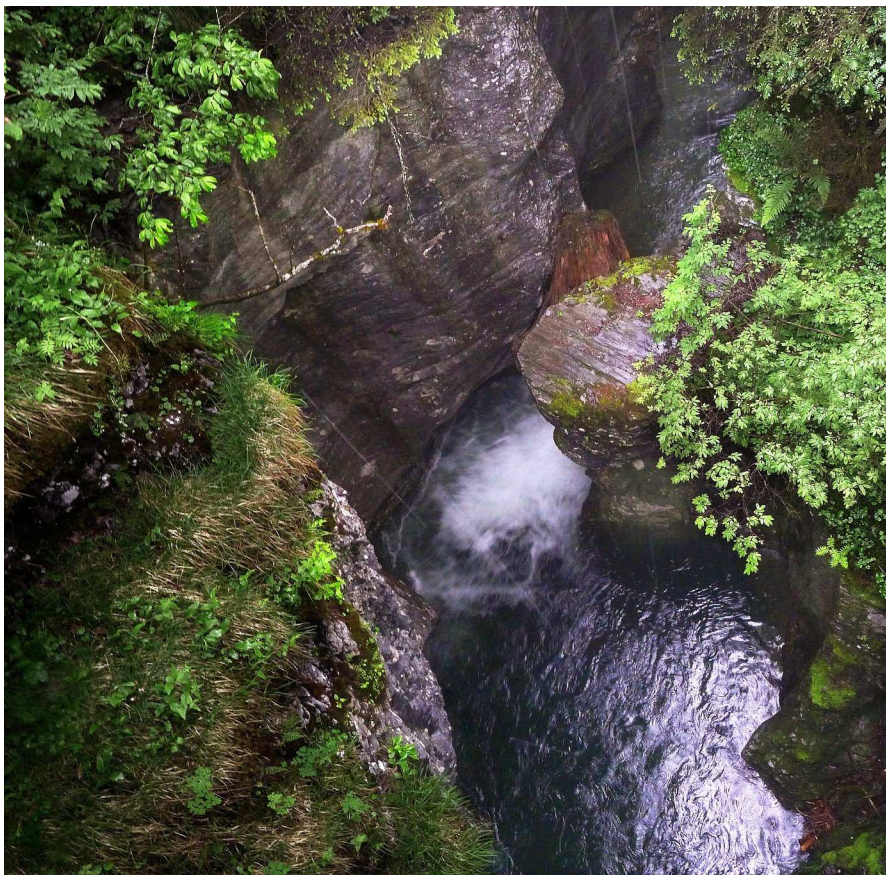


After refreshment I made myself and my kit as waterproof as I could and set off down an easy path into the woods followed by miles on a long and empty road.

The sting was in the tail, getting down to Meiringen you have to traverse a very high cliff. Although you are in woods, the path is steep, slippery and at times a cause for concern. I rolled into the town, a very sodden wee soul, but after a bath, beer and grub all was well with the world.

....How wonderful it is to have a room with a bath when you need it, but only expected a shower.









Meiringen to First Cable Car Station 18km 1572mtrs climb

This proved to be a very close second as one of my favourite day's walk. It started off early; wet, grey and with a stiff climb to the top of Zwirgi above the Reichenbach falls. (where Sherlock Holmes met his fictitious death)

However the climb flattened out and became a pleasant walk by a river. Over coffee the clouds parted to reveal the start of the Jungfrauoch mountain range. From then on it was 'wow' time.

The climb increased to the top of the Grosser Scheidegg pass where there was a coffee stop. I know this is blindingly obvious now, but where there is a roadway to the top of the pass, it is a lot easier even if the path does not follow the road.

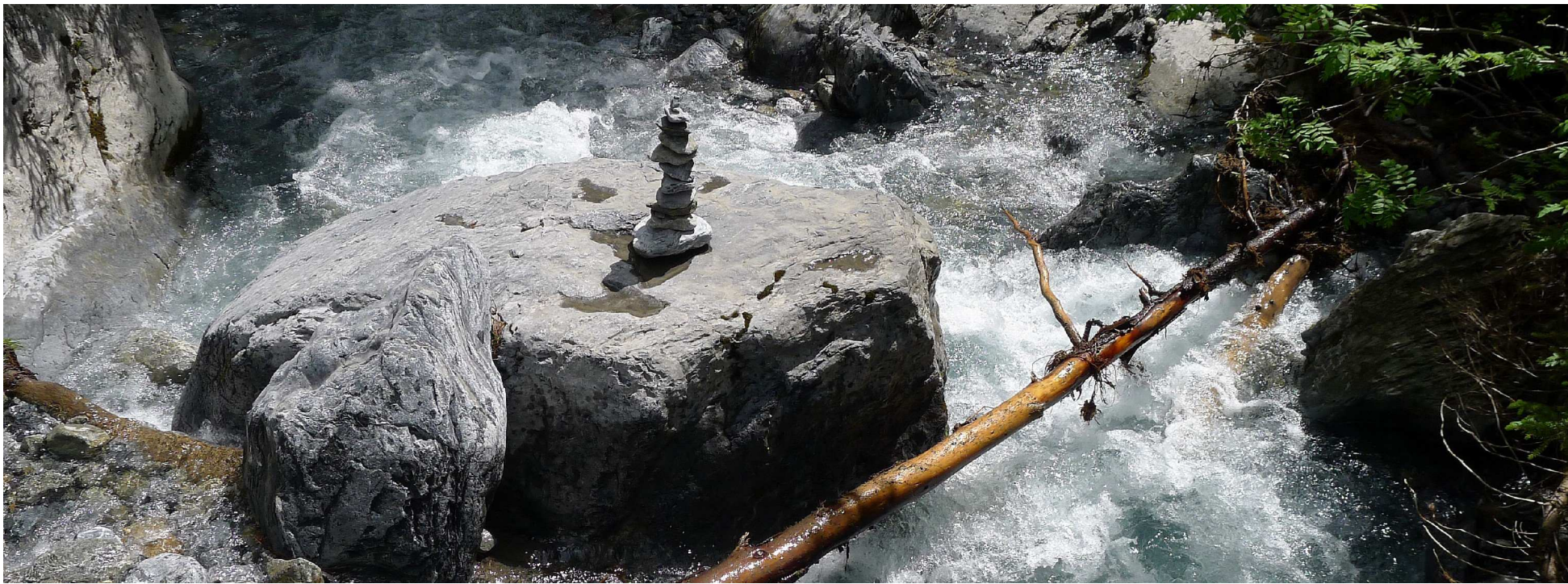




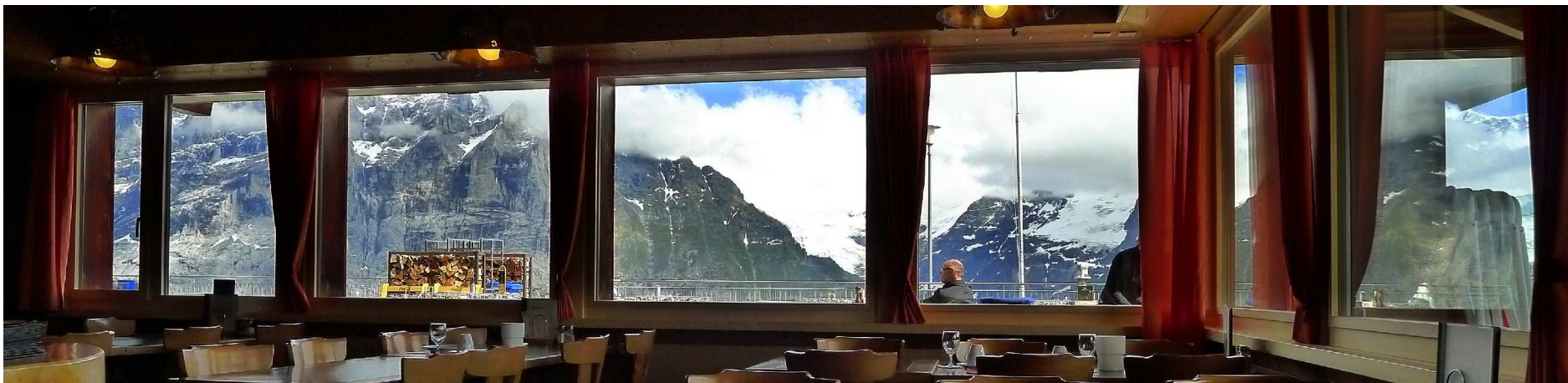












Instead of going down to the busy tourist town of Grindelwald I took an alternative route giving a brilliant balcony walk to the First Cable car station. The scenery was stunning, the walking easy and to top it off the view from my bedroom window was fantastic.

When the cable car closes at 5pm the place is only open to the overnight guests, which on this night were myself and an English couple, so a convivial meal was enjoyed as the mid summer light faded. A very good day at the office.







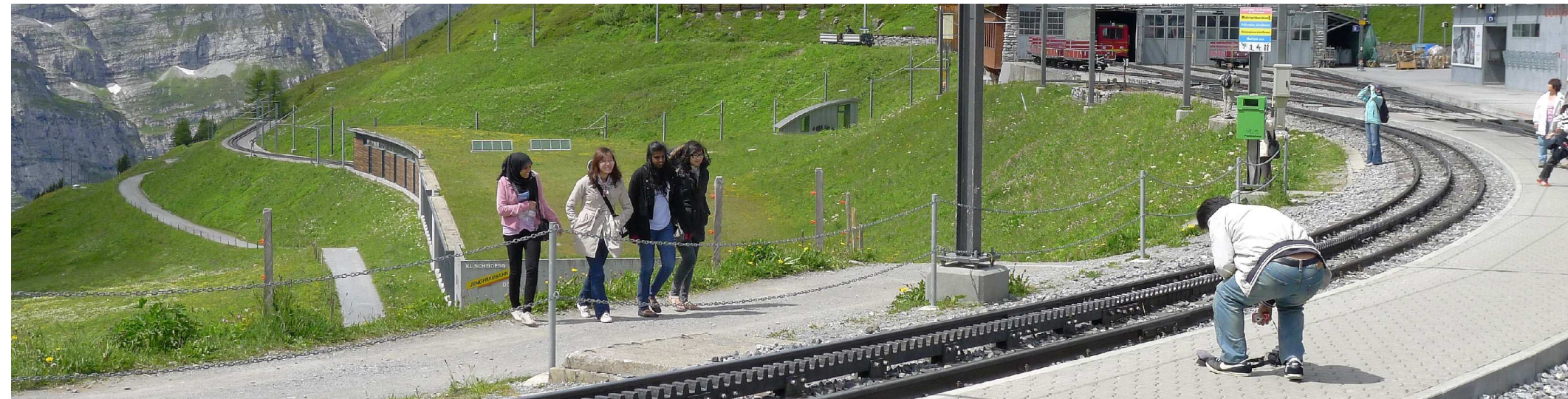
First cable Car Station to Murren 20km 465 climb

Having gone off route yesterday I needed to cover the ground today and I was going to achieve this by many means (Cable Car / Train / Walk / Train / Cable Car/ Walkto be precise)

So after breakfast I took the long (and very expensive) cable car down to Grindelwald, delighted I had not stayed in this tourist packed town. I then made a very short train journey to Alpglen to take off a quick 500mtrs of the days climb.

You are now at the foot of the Eiger so you can go 'ooh' and 'ahh' all the way to the top of the pass, which is a huge tourist railway station and posing place. I quickly walked through this and took a very pleasant walk down to Wengen. The scenery was stunning with clear skies over the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau mountains.













Just before Wengen I stopped at a cafe for coffee which was run by an English couple. The wife of the pair asked me where I was going and pointed to the cliff underneath Wengen saying that if I wanted to spend an hour or two descending to Lauterbrunnen on a terrible path to go ahead.... but she recommended the train.

I am glad to say I took her advice followed by the cable car strait up the other side followed by another pleasant balcony walk to Murren, another carless tourist town. OK the walking was not too demanding today but it was very enjoyable and the other bits of 'assistance' added to the fun of the day.

On the minus side I stayed in a soulless dump of a hotel, which left the day on a bit of a downer.



Murren to Oberer Bundalp 18km 1374mtrs climb

This was going to be a very tough and at times worrying day and probably not one I would want to repeat any time soon. On the up side the weather was glorious and the scenery magnificent.

The climb up was hard going until I came to the last section up to the pass. This was more difficult as snow had filled in the path hollows and the scree outside the path was slippery and very steep. I slipped a few times on the loose rock and was glad of some help for the final few meters from a couple of German climbers who were conveniently loafing about at the top. Things did not get better on the other side and I slipped a few times on the steep snow fields on the way down.

The next day was going to be the highest pass on the route, so I decided to knock off a 'quick' 400 meters of it at the end of the day. I discovered that climbing at the beginning of the day is one thing.... at the end I was worn out.







I stopped for coffee at a mountain hut on the way up to Sefienfurke pass. The supply 'lorry' on the right arrived just before I did.

The cost of transportation was the justifiable excuse for the charge of 4SF (£3) for a cup of instant coffee, but it was worth it.













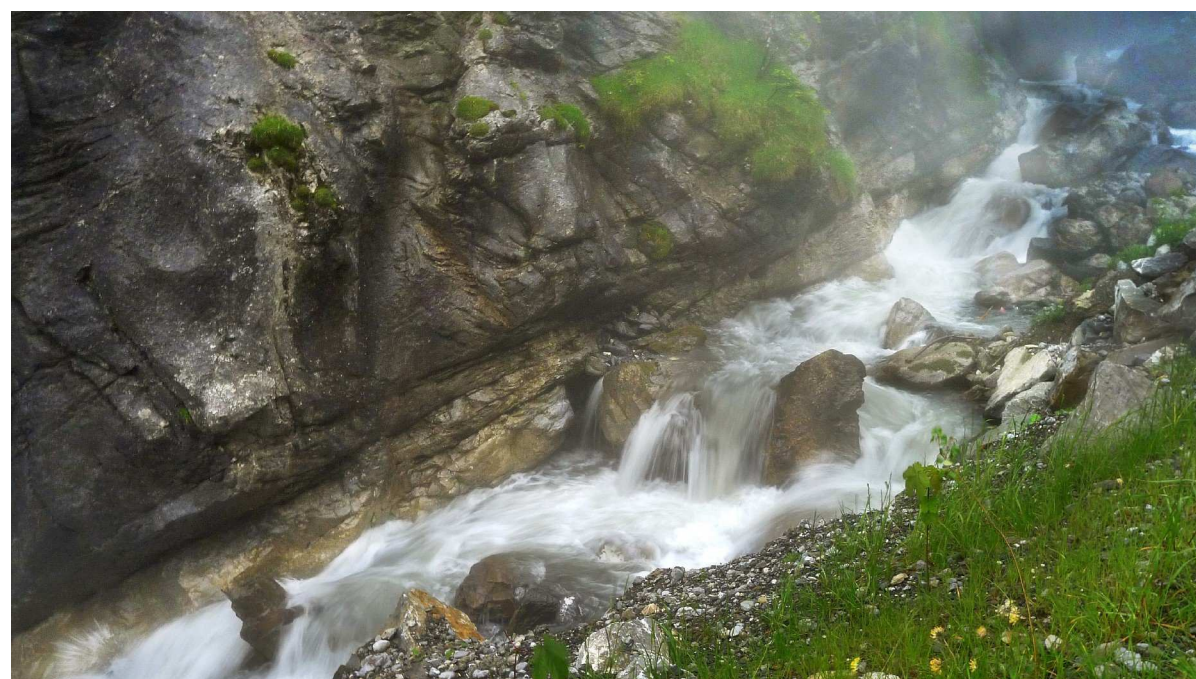
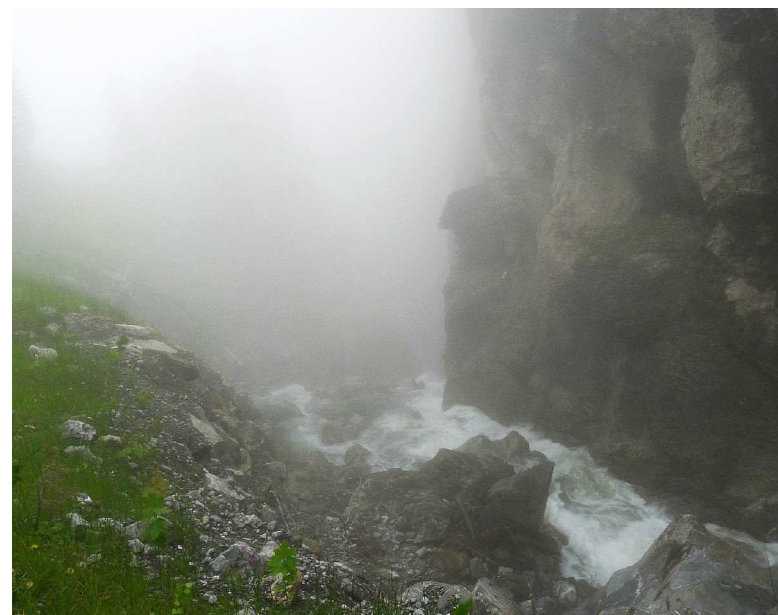


Oberi Bundalp to Greizalp 4km 400mtrs descent ! ... Then to Kanerstag by bus / train

Over dinner the previous evening with a German couple, the next day's pass was assessed. If I had walked it would have been the highest on the trip. We were also joined by a Swiss couple who had come the other way and said there was a lot of snow on this side of the pass.

Conscious that I am walking alone and it is very early in the year (hence more snow) I let common sense into my life and decided to give the pass a miss.

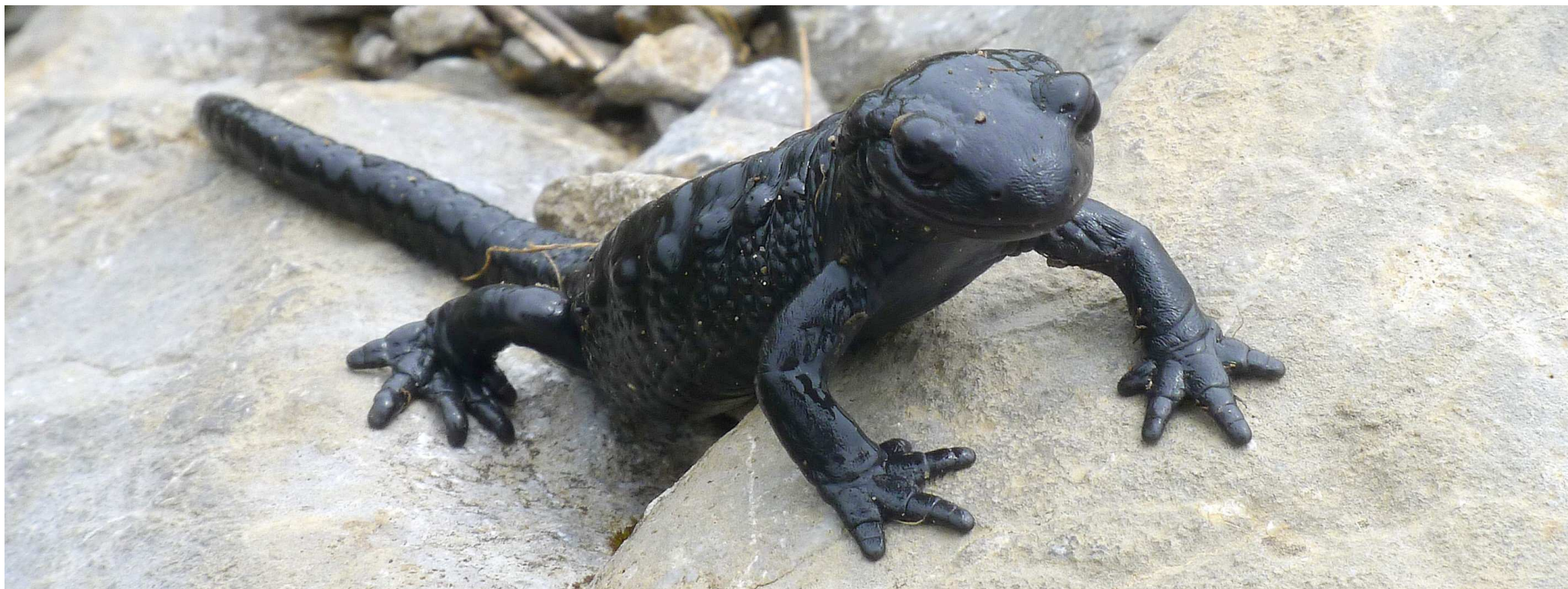
Sadly I had to retrace my steps over the 400 mtrs I had climbed yesterday to make this day easier. I then caught a bus and train to Kanderstag. A pleasant day was spent loafing around and generally relaxing in this tourist town. Probably a good thing.



Kanderstag to Boden 16Km 1209mtrs climb

Today should have been wet but the storm went through overnight. I was left with a very grey day with low cloud and very limited visibility. The pass was just a long slow climb, it became a little worrisome at the end with scree paths that sloped outwards where you were sure (although you could not see it) there was a huge drop.

Crossing the pass the path became even more hazardous, but suddenly the clouds parted and I could see I was in a bowl, so if I did slip I would have survived to tell the tale. I now had the last of the journey's high passes behind me. The rest of the day was spent in a soggy but relatively easy descent to Boden, fitting in a coffee stop, where I enjoyed mine hostess giving a performance on a mountain horn. While I was having coffee a very sharp rain storm passed over while I sat in the dry. Moral of the story, don't irritate the rain gods playing massive horns.





Sometimes I see something and know I want to paint it..... eventually.

The breaking mist on the picture to my right was not only a big relief but a wonderful scene.











Boden to Lenk 14km 400mtrs climb

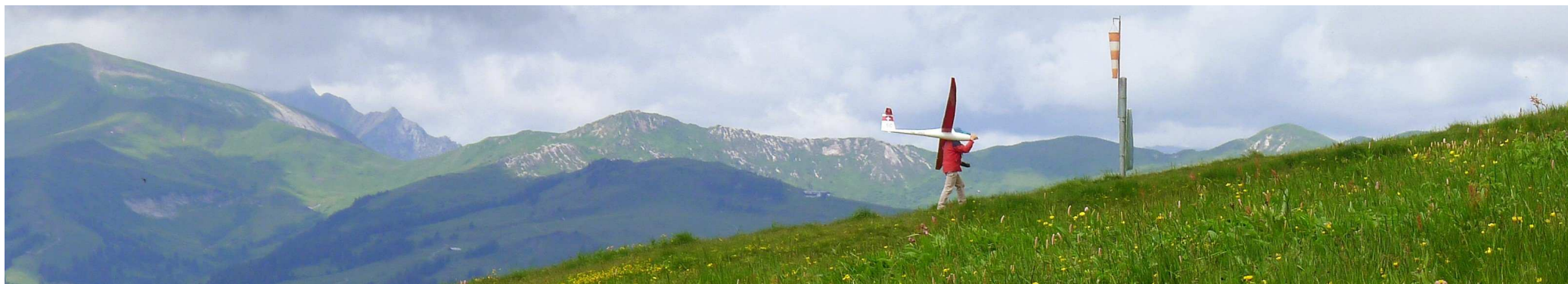
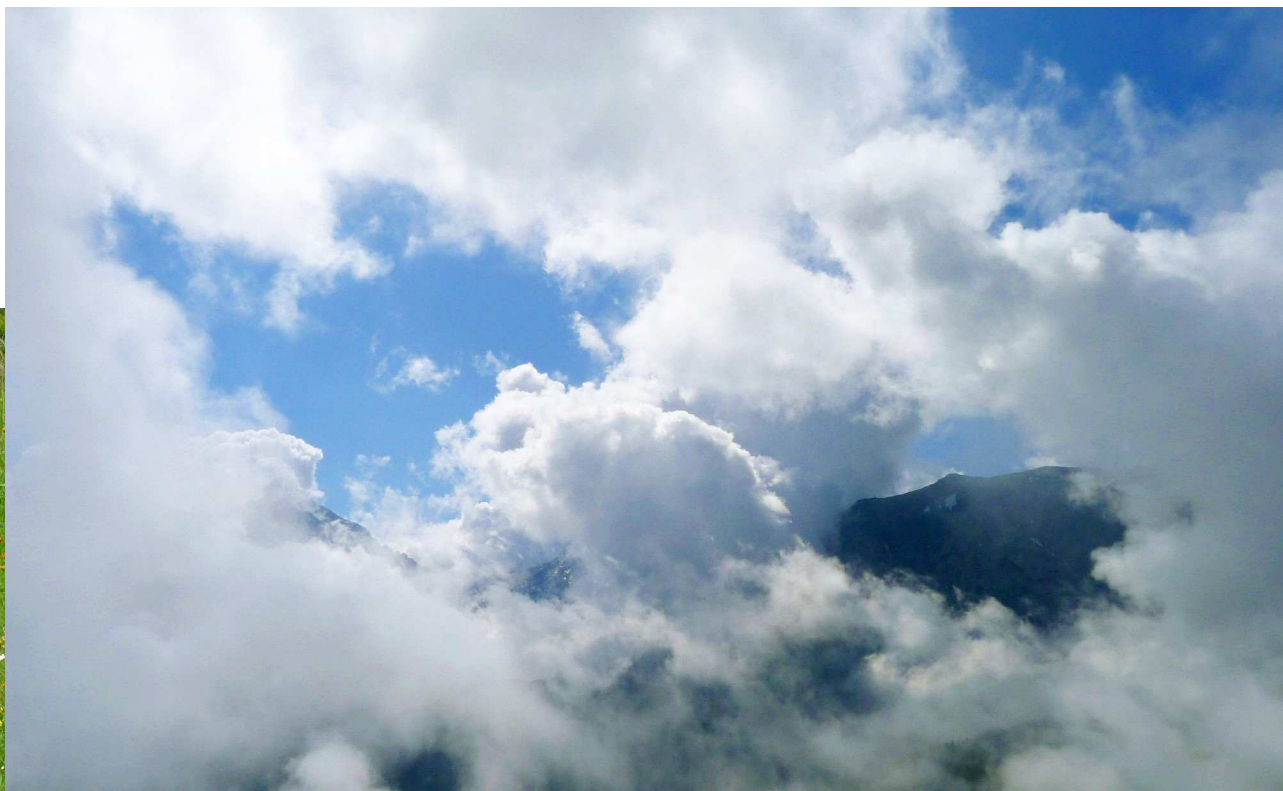
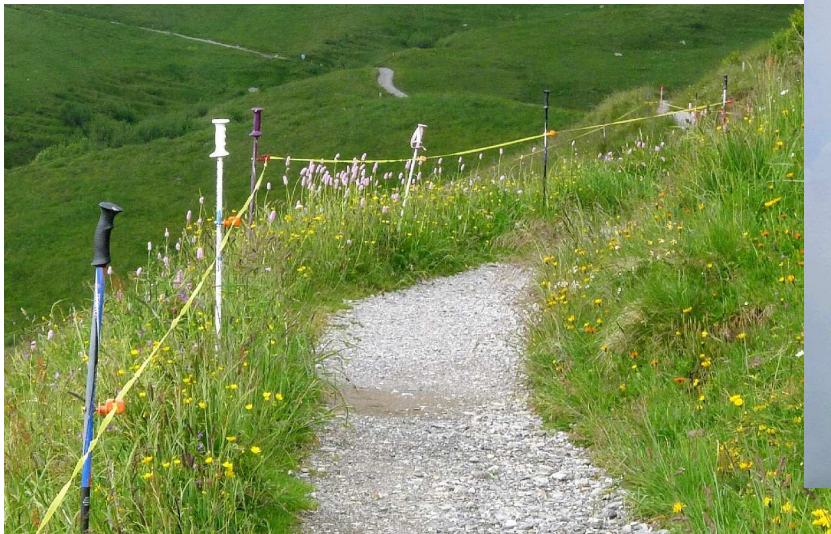
Today looked good in the guide book and no I did not get on a cable car straight away. (It only went along rather than up.... so no point, as the above photo demonstrates.) The day started with a long walk along a river bank.....then after 2 hours I found a cable car that took me vertically up 500mtrs on to a short detour to another great balcony walk to the Hahnenmoospass. The alps of Switzerland has three notable agricultural 'things' cows, (very few sheep) flies that live off the cows and their output and electrical fencing to control the cows. I was pleased to see one farmer using discarded walking and skiing poles for fence support.

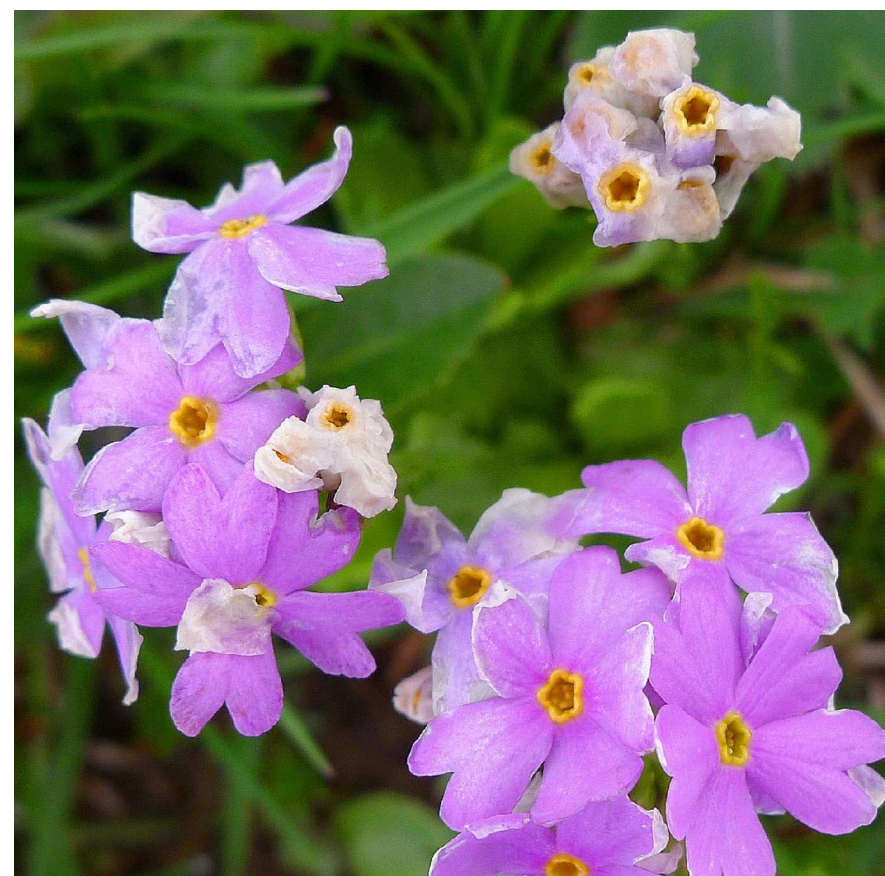
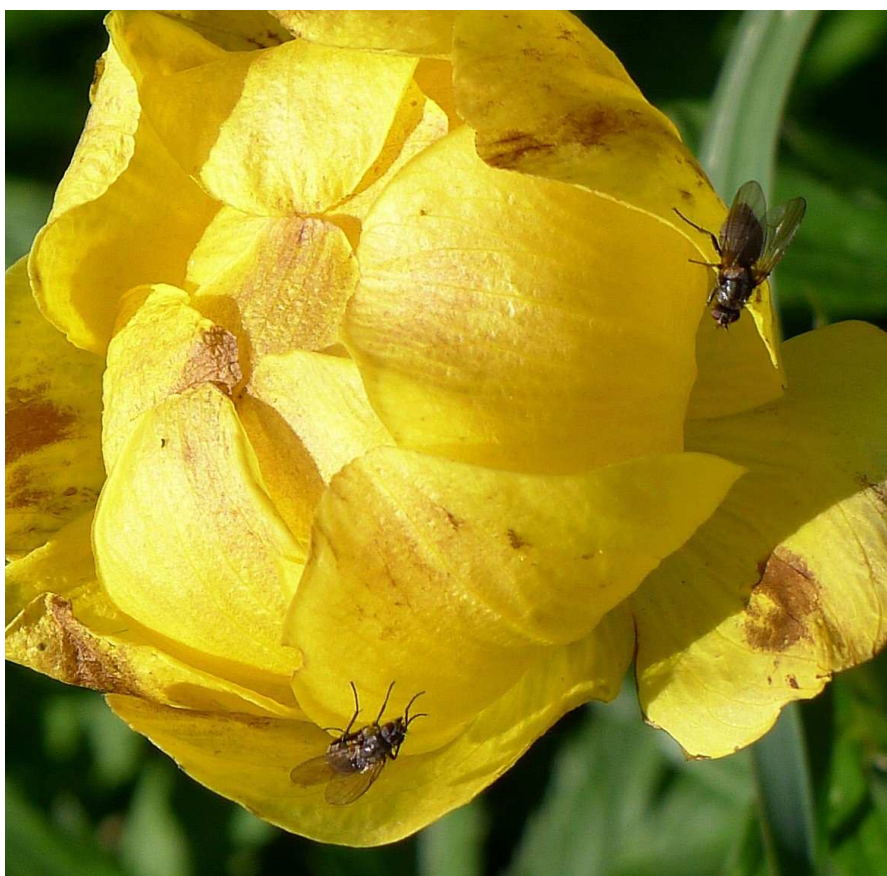
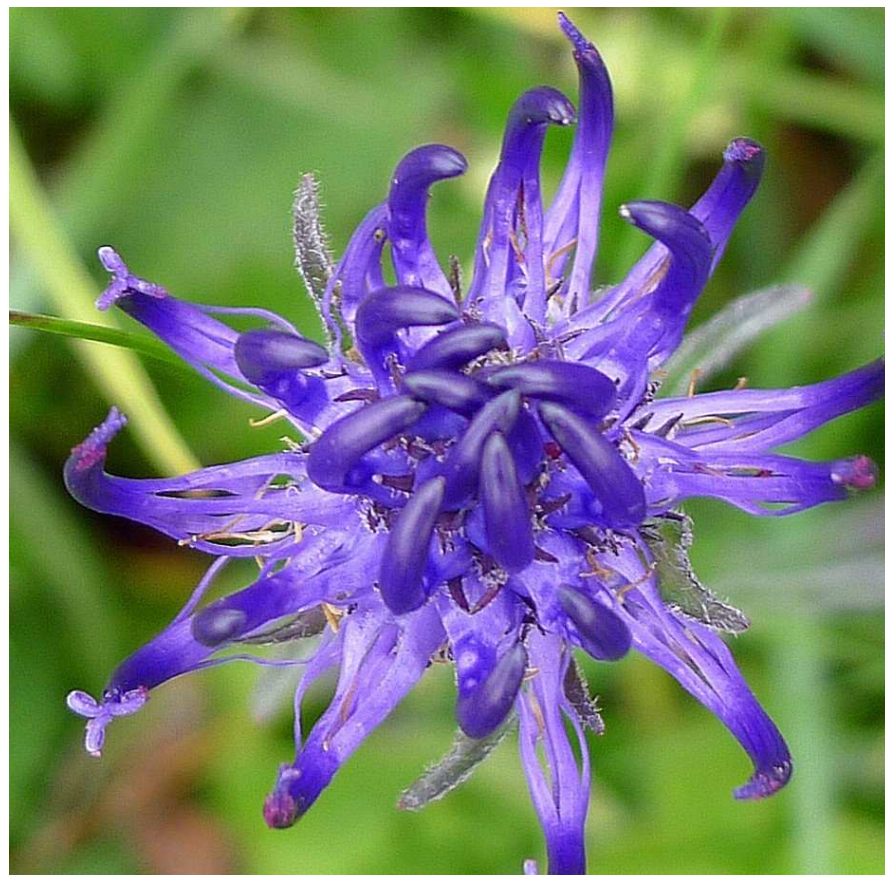
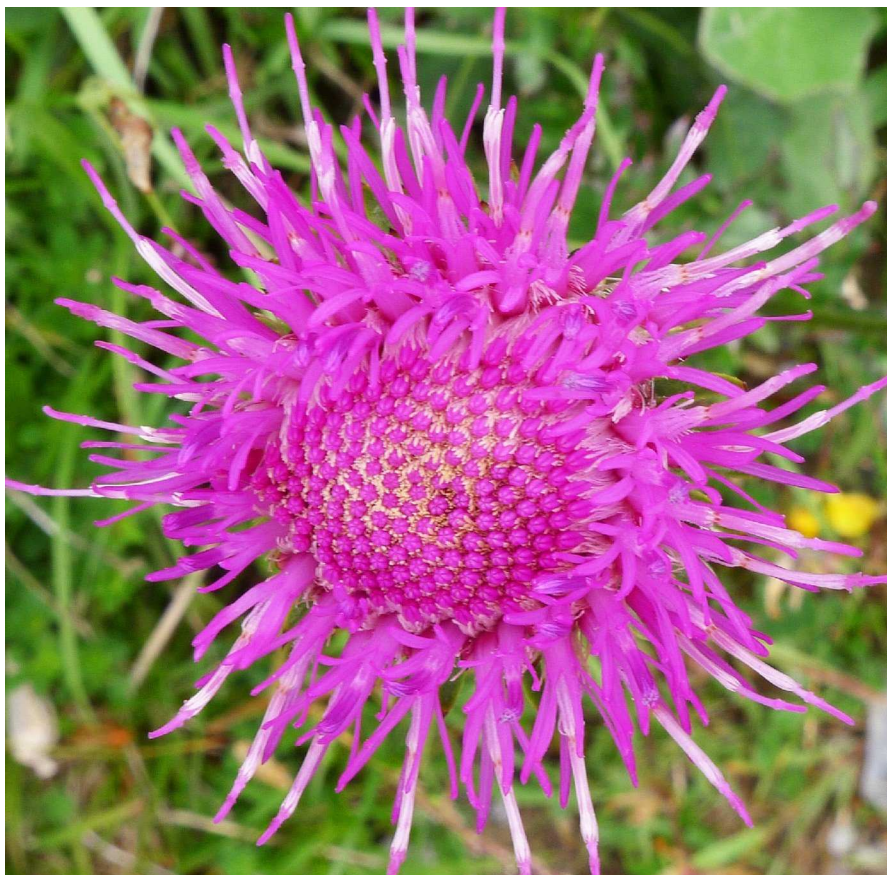
Magnificent scenery with an abundance of spring flowers. Also when I arrived at the top of the pass, there seemed to be a lot of men of a certain age, with big model gliders and aircraft. I then discovered a whole room of them.... a massive big boy's toy club; splendid.

The walk down to Lenk was as gentle as a 900 mtr descent could be. I booked into The Hotel Alpina which was 'highly recommended' in the guide book, clean modern, very helpful and good value for Switzerland. A very pleasant and dare I say it easy day.



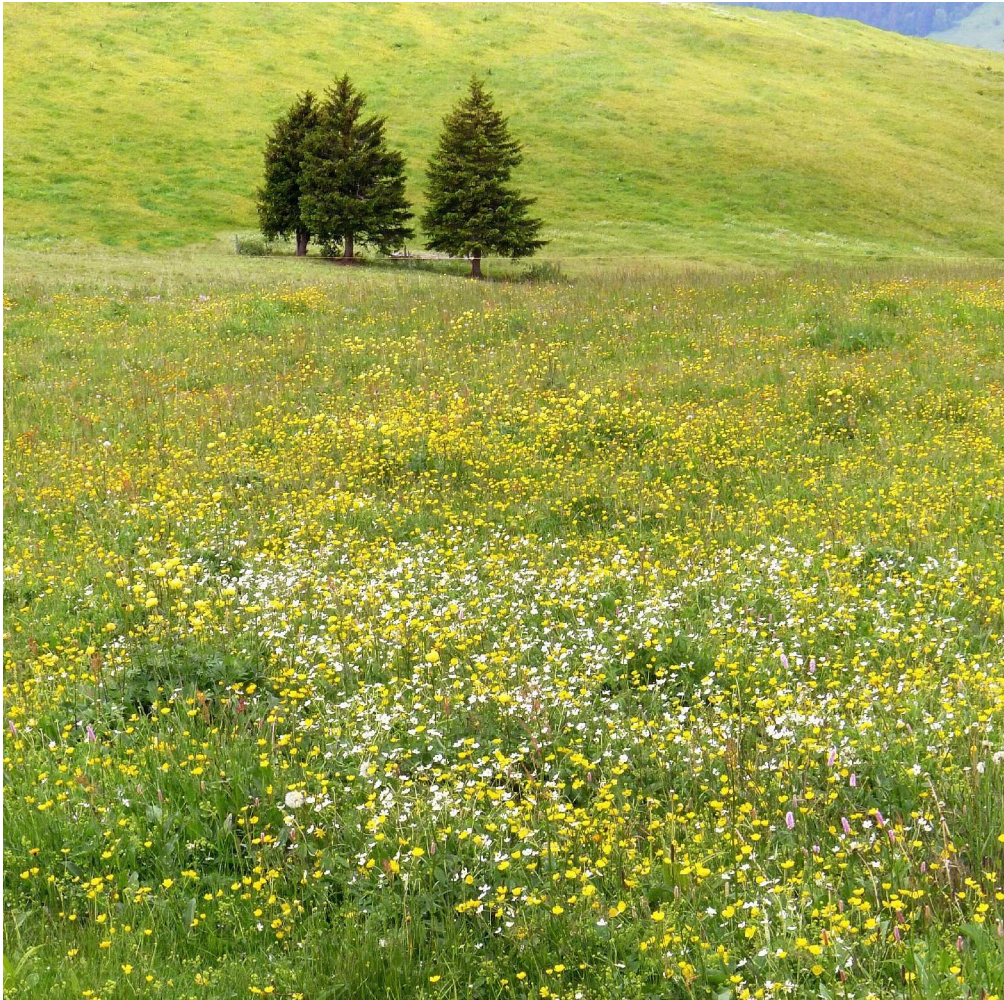














Above : The view from my bedroom at Lenk.

Below: Protestant churches in Switzerland are not normally places of artistic activity, but this one in Lenk proved the exception.



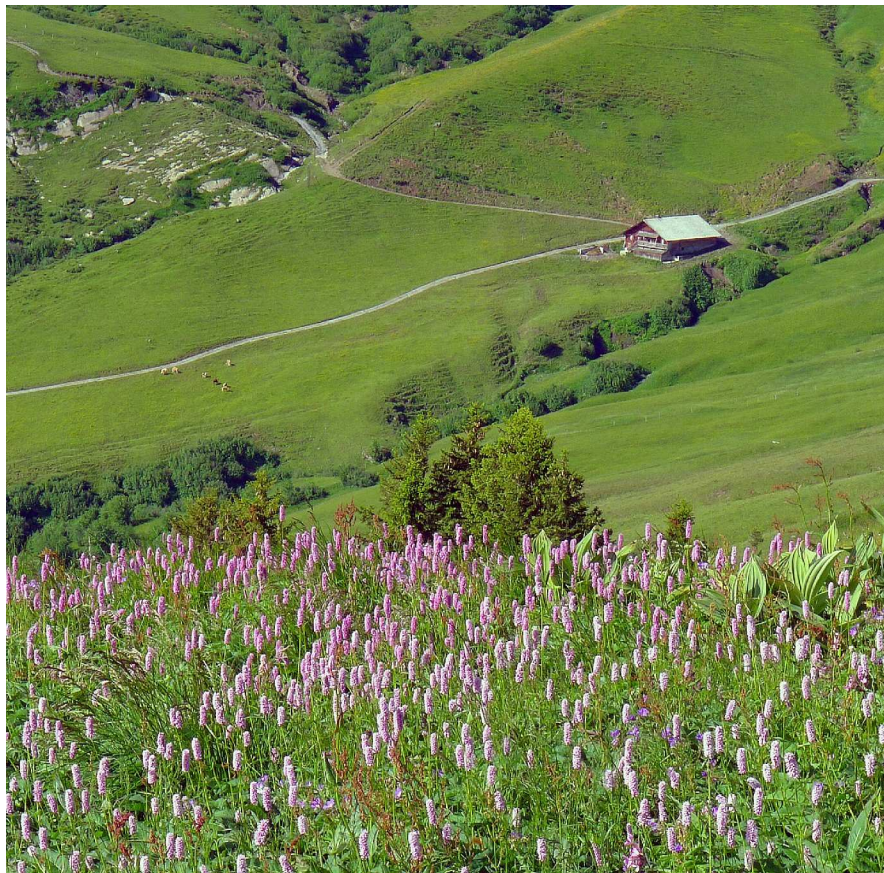


Lenk to Gsteig 18Km 500mtrs climb

Today was going to be a walk over two relatively low passes, but I decided to go on a detour again using the handy cable car just outside the front door of the hotel. This led to another balcony walk along a ridge to Truttlisberg pass.

Then followed a pleasant day's walking through meadows that were now being cut . The Krinnen pass was spectacularly understated, just a gap in some trees. The hotel in the small village of Gsteig had the most fantastic frontage. We are now well away from the Bernese Oberland, the scenery is less spectacular and there are very few tourists.

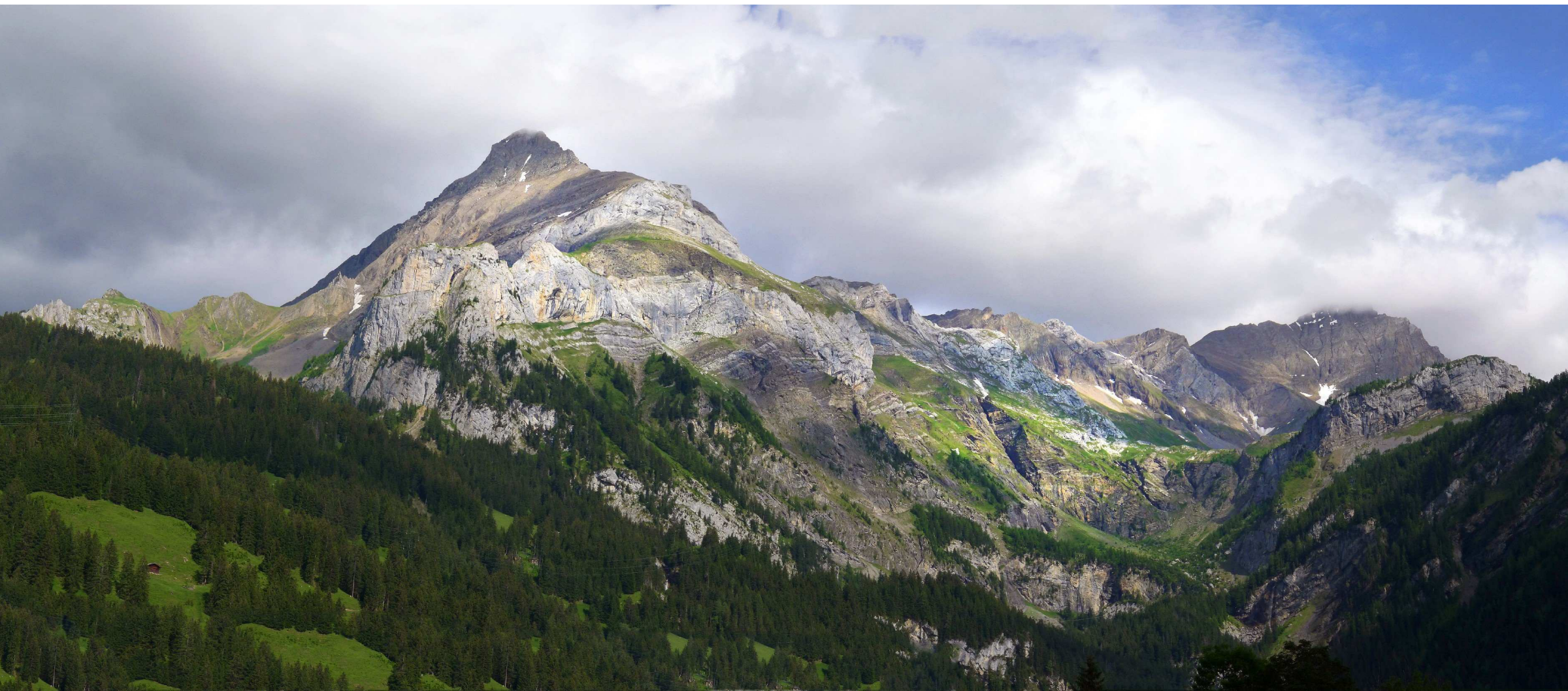
The bottom left picture over the next page shows my approach to lunch in Switzerland, which is an expensive place. Breakfast was usually provided with the room, so I ate very well, then and survived on a banana, apple and cereal bar until the evening. The system worked well if you could find a coffee along the way.













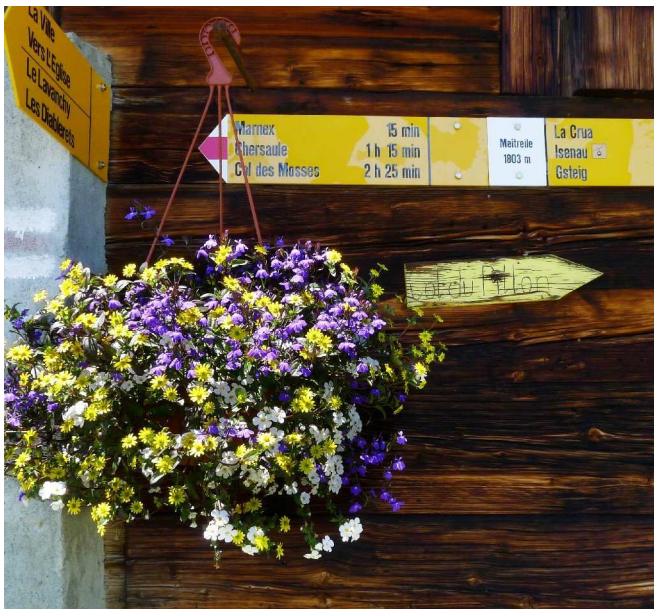


Gsteig to Col des Moses 23km 1050mtrs climb

This was always going to be a tough but unavoidable day.... No cable cars, well not in the right place anyway. It was now very hot and I managed to drink 3litres of water without any difficulty.

The day started with a tough climb up to the Blattipass. I crossed over to the French speaking part of Switzerland and as it was Sunday I was met by large groups enjoying the traditional leisurely lunch in the mountain restaurants. I arrived at Col des Moses at 5pm tired, hot and in need of a medicinal beer . The village seemed to be all about today's Sunday market and cafes to support the visitors. (shops are shut in Switzerland on Sunday)













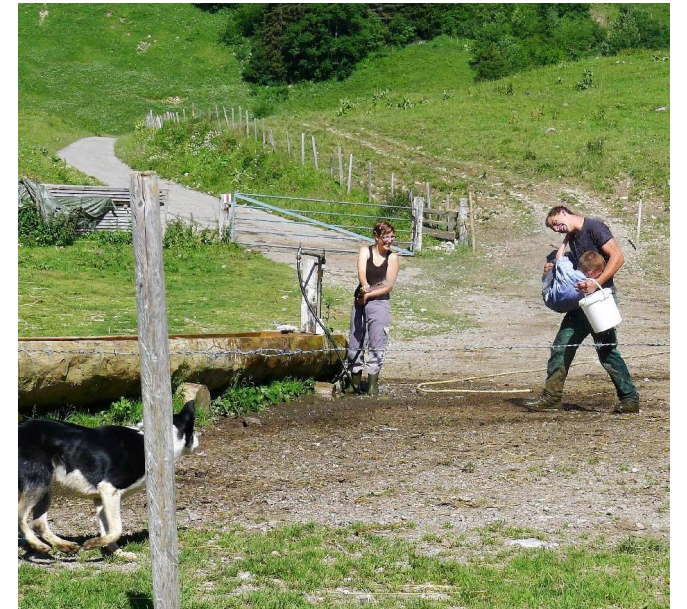
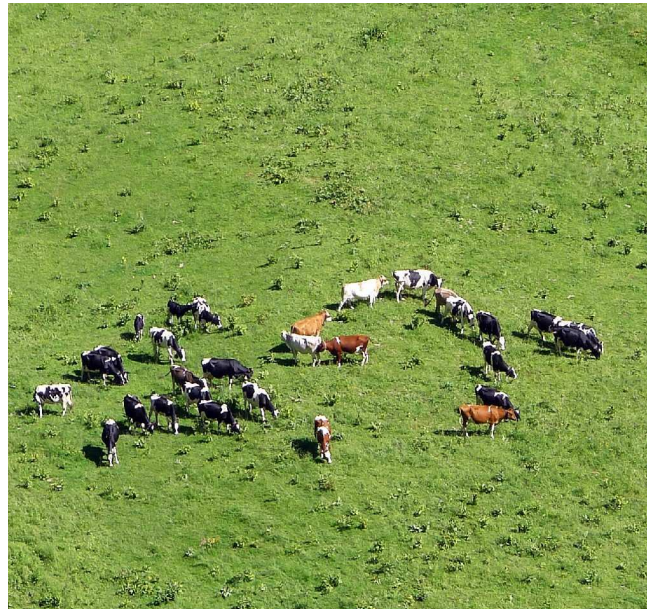
Col des Moses to Roscers de Naye 24km 800mtrs climb

The last day had a certain urgency to it. I was booked on the evening flight home from Geneva , the full distance from Col des Moses to Montreux was 28km with 1500mtrs of descent at the end.

So I settled for a plan laid out in the guide book where after seeing a magnificent view of Lake Geneva at the top of a pass, you divert to a tourist railway station in the middle of nowhere. This avoids the big descent to Lake Geneva and saves a few kilometres. What it did not say is that you need to climb over a heart stopping ridge to get to the station. 2D photos does not do justice to the excitement. To make sure I achieved my plan, I set off at first light at 5.30 am ...hence the strange colour to a few early pictures.







I stop for coffee on a farm near the pass. On a very hot day a small boy playfully splashes his elder brother and sister. This is only going to end one way..... and gives me 10 minuets of light relief before younger brother is dumped in the trough.

The coffee was served with thick fresh cream. Very impressive, but philistine that I am, I look forward to my Costa Coffee fix at home the next day.















I arrived at the Rochers de Naye railway station at 3pm, throw my now knackered walking pole in the bin and climbed on the train that was about to depart. Arriving at Montreux I caught the next connecting train to Geneva Airport, where I slept quietly in a corner waiting for my flight home.

A great journey, probably not to be repeated any time soon, but I am very glad I have had the experiance of seeing the terrific scenery of Switzerland.



