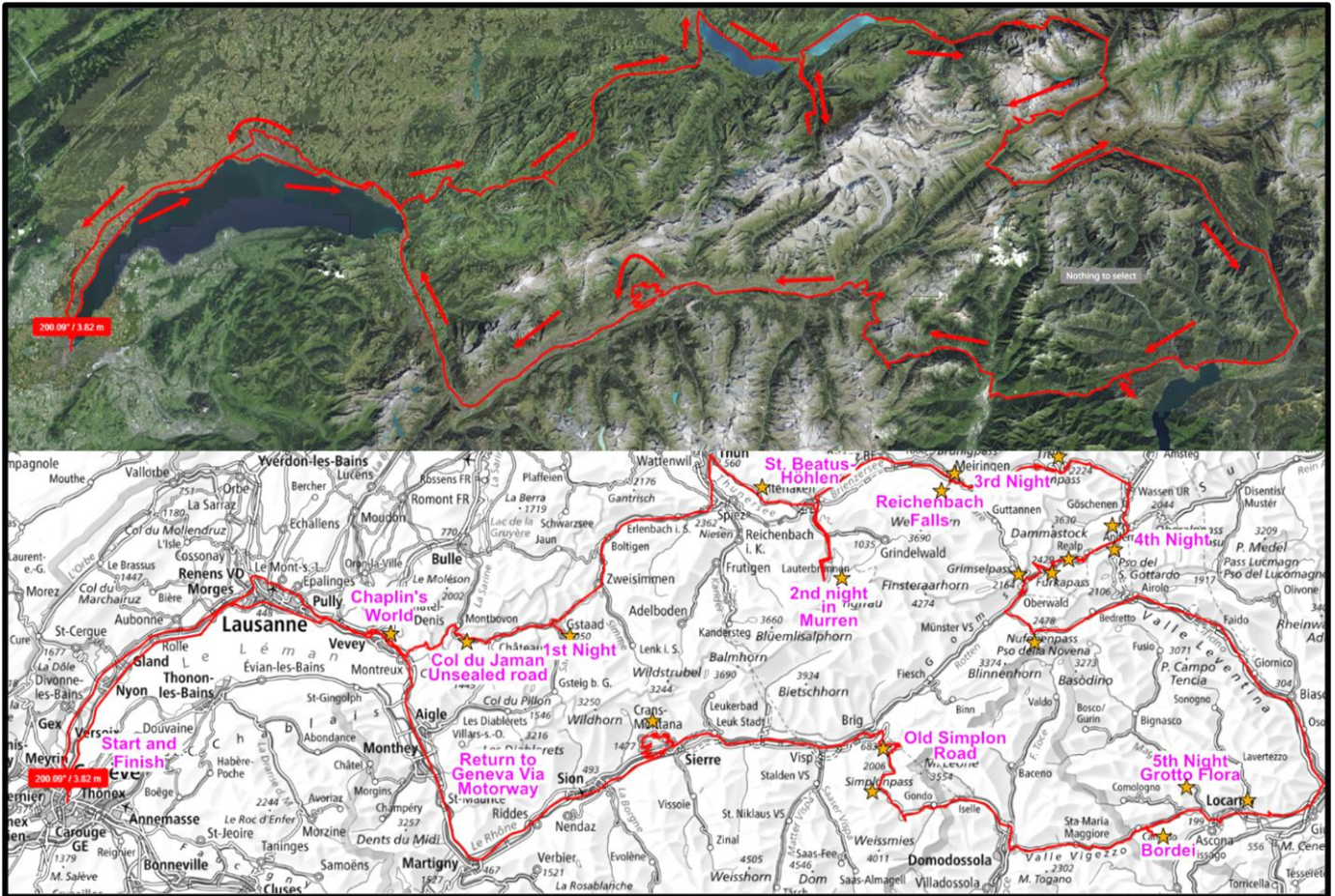


The Journey We Never Planned



Old Friends and the Less Travelled Roads

When Freedom Became the Destination

There comes a point in life when time quietly changes its value.

In our twenties, we measured it in ambition. In our forties, in responsibilities. By our sixties, we had learned that time had become life's greatest luxury.

Perhaps that is why, when a lifelong friend and I decided to spend a few days driving through Switzerland, we made one simple promise before turning the key.

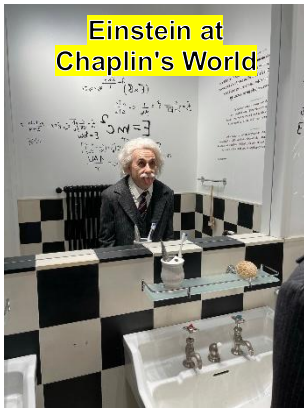
We would make no plans, no itinerary, no hotel reservations, no deadlines, and no sat-nav dictating the quickest route. If a road looked interesting, we would follow it. If we liked a village, we would stay. If we found ourselves somewhere unexpected by evening, then that was where we would look for a hotel.

The destination no longer mattered. The journey did...

We left Geneva on a bright autumn morning.

The city slowly gave way to vineyards cascading towards Lake Geneva, while the distant Alps shimmered beneath a cloudless sky. The car settled effortlessly into its rhythm. Conversation came easily, interrupted only by the occasional silence that exists between old friends. After more than half a century of knowing one another, silence no longer needed filling. Sometimes the finest conversations are the ones that never happen.

Our first stop was Chaplin's World, Corsier-sur-Vevey



It seemed somehow appropriate. Charlie Chaplin had spent his later years overlooking the same lake that stretched before us, surrounded by vineyards and mountains. Walking through his home reminded us that even one of the world's greatest entertainers had eventually chosen tranquillity over applause.

Leaving Corsier-sur-Vevey, we could easily have continued along the main road. Instead, almost without discussion, we turned towards the Col du Jaman, not even knowing if it was suitable to drive. Neither of us was trying to reach anywhere in particular.

The road simply looked more inviting for discovery. That became the unwritten rule of the journey. Whenever the obvious route presented itself, we instinctively searched for another. This is not one of Switzerland's celebrated mountain passes and rarely appears

in travel brochures. Yet that is precisely its charm. The road climbs steadily through forests before emerging onto open alpine pastures where the panorama unfolds almost without warning. Below, Lake Geneva stretched towards France, while beyond it the mountains seemed to fade into an endless blue horizon.

We stopped. Not because there was a designated viewpoint. Simply because the view deserved our time.

No timetable ever includes moments like that.

We reached the pass by late afternoon and in the absence of vehicle restriction signs, we opened the gate and followed a cow track for a kilometre or so. Soon a sealed road carried us towards Gstaad.

Our First Night: Gstaad

Neither of us had planned to stay there. In truth, we had not planned to stay anywhere. It simply felt like the right place to end the day.

Elegant without ever becoming ostentatious, Gstaad possesses that uniquely Swiss ability to combine understated luxury with genuine authenticity. Timber chalets stand beside discreet boutiques, while flower-filled balconies overlook streets where everything seems beautifully unhurried. It even has its own Airport!

We found a hotel, left our bags upstairs and wandered into the village as evening settled over the mountains. Dinner lasted rather longer than either of us expected. Not because we were celebrating anything in particular. Simply because neither of us was in a hurry to leave.

There is something strangely liberating about waking the next morning without already knowing where you will sleep that night.

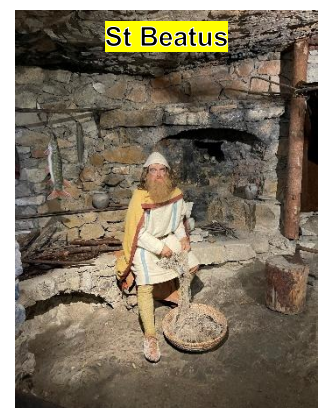
The following day brought exactly that freedom

Breakfast over. Maps folded away. We simply drove.

The roads wound gently through the Bernese Oberland, toward Thun. Each valley revealed another landscape that seemed somehow even more beautiful than the last. It is difficult to explain Switzerland to someone who has never driven across it. Photographs capture the mountains; Videos capture the roads but neither quite captures the feeling.

There are moments when the scenery becomes so extraordinary that conversation simply stops. Driver and passenger alike fall silent, each privately absorbing the same view through different eyes.

Those moments occurred more often than either of us expected.



Eventually the road led us towards Lauterbrunnen.



We continued to follow the road that took us to the Town of Thun and continued along the right bank of the lake towards Interlaken. The sinuous road through lakeside villages, tunnels and cliffs passed St Beatus caves then into Interlaken and on to Lauterbrunnen. Long before reaching the village itself, waterfalls began appearing high on the cliffs that enclosed the valley. Some fell in delicate ribbons, others thundered from impossible heights, disappearing into the trees below.

The landscape felt almost theatrical, as though nature had decided ordinary beauty simply wasn't enough.

High above the valley sat Mürren. Perched on its narrow terrace beneath the towering Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau, the village appears almost suspended between mountain and sky.

Cars are left behind

The mountain is reached by cable car and railway, preserving a silence that has become increasingly rare in modern Europe. Walking through its flower-lined streets, we realised that once again we had arrived somewhere neither of us had intended to visit that morning. Yet somehow it had become one of the highlights of the journey.

Perhaps that was beginning to teach us something. The less we planned... ..the more we discovered.

That evening, as we once again searched for somewhere to spend the night, we laughed at the question that had already become part of our daily routine.

"So... Where shall we sleep tonight?"

The answer was always the same: "We'll know when we get there."

And somehow, we always did.

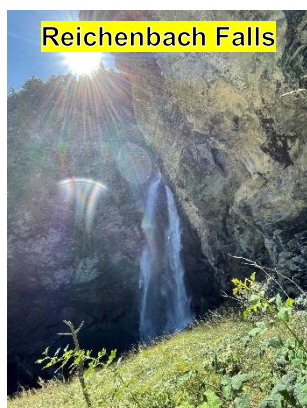
Looking back now, I realise the journey had already begun to change us. Not dramatically. Not in any life-altering way. But quietly.

Modern life teaches us to optimise everything: The fastest route. The most efficient schedule. The shortest journey. Switzerland was teaching us something different.

Sometimes the longest road becomes the richest memory. Sometimes the unexpected detour becomes the highlight of the day, and sometimes, the greatest luxury is not the destination waiting at the end of the road... ..but having no reason to hurry there.



Hello Sherlock



Morning arrived with no discussion about where we should go. There was never a need. One of us simply pointed towards a road, the other would nod, and that became the day's plan. All we knew, is not to double back on our route.

This meant going through Meiringen. Here we stopped for lunch. Indeed, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, in 1893, set the dramatic ending of his book, the Final problem, at some nearby waterfall. Both, Doctor Moriarty and his nemesis, Sherlock Holmes, fell from the Reichenbach Falls to a short-lived death. Hidden inside the mountain itself, ten glacial waterfalls thunder through narrow rock chambers carved over thousands of years by meltwater descending from the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau.

Standing beside t

Seeing the rushing water, it is impossible not to feel humbled by nature's patience. The mountain had taken millennia to shape what we were privileged to witness for only a few minutes. Not every masterpiece is created by man.

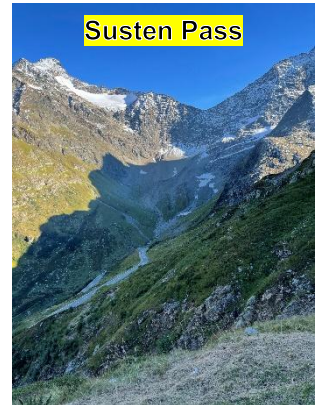
Standing beside the roaring torrent, watching the water disappear into the gorge below, the scene suddenly became entirely believable. One could almost imagine Holmes and Professor Moriarty locked in their final struggle before vanishing into the spray. Fortunately, Holmes and few book Moriarty returned. We preferred not to test the theory ourselves. We found at hotel in Meiringen and the following day belonged entirely to the mountains

The Susten Pass

After breakfast, a leisurely stroll in the town, we came across a plaque explaining that Eva Zenk Iggland describes in her book how Holmes, after having survived the fall, had secured the help of a leading Alpine guide, Melchior Anderegg, for the likely equipment needed to travel his escape route through the Susten Pass to Wassen, and then the train to the Italian border. This made the Susten Pass a must.

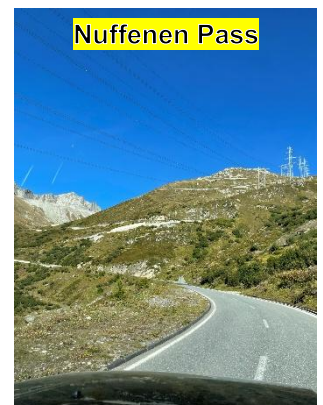
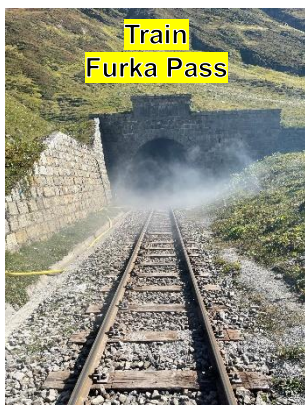
In the heart of Switzerland, roads spoken of with quiet respect by those who genuinely enjoy driving. They are not simply roads. They are masterpieces of engineering. Hairpin bends cling to mountainsides. Granite cliffs rise beside crystal-clear reservoirs. Glaciers appear unexpectedly around a bend before disappearing once more behind another summit. Every few kilometres another lay-by tempted us to stop. Not because we needed a rest. Because another photograph somehow seemed essential.

By late afternoon we had stopped trying to count how many times we had said, "Just one more picture." It was never just one more. Eventually the mountains softened and by nightfall we were in Andermatt. We found a hotel... ..Being the one were the cast and crew of Dr No had stayed, we started to wonder if the was a theme to our voyage.



007 and other Great Alpine Passes

Knowing we had one more night left, we suggested to together, for different reasons, to head for the neighbouring Canton on of Ticino. There was just the Gotthard pass to negotiate...



So, as usual decided to follow the road and scenery which meant the Furka, Grimsel and Nuffenen Passes into Lugano. This three sibling Giants may have the same origins, but are no triplets having no more in common than the Attenborough brothers, David and Richard.

Villa Grotto Flora

Names that had lived for years only on maps suddenly became reality.

Switzerland had quietly become Italian.

The architecture changed - The language changed - Even time seemed to move differently.



Villa Grotto Flora



Villa Grotto Flora

Dinner and our overnight stay were enjoyed was at Villa Grotto Flora, where the food was every bit as memorable as the day's drive.

Having to conclude the adventure, for the first time we knew where tomorrow would take us. Neither of us would have wanted it any other way, but... Needs must.

The final morning began with no intention other than returning, eventually, to Geneva. Eventually. The word that gave us wonderful freedom. The motorway would have taken us home efficiently.

The Centovalli and the Simplon are the logical route.

Instead, a narrow road climbing into the mountains caught our attention. There was no reason to take it, which, naturally, became the perfect reason. The road became steeper. Narrower. The bends tighter, Traffic disappeared almost entirely. It felt less like driving towards somewhere than driving away from everything.

Bordei

Eventually we reached Bordei.

Tiny.

Peaceful.

Hidden high above the Centovalli Valley, this remarkable village feels almost untouched by modern life. Beautifully restored stone houses sit quietly along narrow paths where silence is interrupted only by birdsong and the distant

sound of church bells. There are no souvenir shops. No large hotels. No coaches arriving every few minutes.

Only an overwhelming sense that some places are best discovered accidentally.

Standing there, I remember thinking that had we planned this journey properly, we would almost certainly never have found Bordei.

Perhaps that was its greatest gift.

Reluctantly we left.



Road to Bordei



Bordei



Bordei

The Simplon Pass



Simplon Old Road

An ancient European arterial route of Europe, the Italian side is still dramatically narrow on the Italian side. The entry back to Switzerland. The modern Swiss wide road left our heart empty. A decision had to be made. We had to accept the end of the vagabond status. Yet even now, with Geneva waiting, curiosity refused to let us drive directly there, so, for the first time on our voyage we decided 2 things

We would go through Crans Montana

Let the road guide us to there

Descending towards Brig, we took the old road, narrower, far more scenic. The road eventually carried us north once more towards the Rhône Valley

Crans-Montana

The road climbed once again towards Crans-Montana.

High above the valley, terraces overlooked an extraordinary panorama stretching across the Valais Alps.

We ordered coffee. Not because we were tired. Simply because neither of us wished the journey to end. The view demanded our attention.

Conversation became quieter. Perhaps we both realised that the adventure was over.



Crans-Montana

Returning to Geneva

As we descended towards Lake Geneva later that afternoon, I found myself reflecting on the previous six days.

People often imagine luxury as something expensive.

Fine hotels - Beautiful cars - Exclusive restaurants.

Those things certainly have their place. But somewhere between the Col du Jaman and Bordei, between the Reichenbach Falls and Crans-Montana, I had begun to understand luxury differently.

Luxury is waking up without knowing where the road will lead.

Luxury is taking the longer route simply because it looks more beautiful.

Luxury is having time to stop whenever a view deserves your attention.

Above all, luxury is sharing those moments with someone who has known you since childhood.

The memories become richer because they are shared.

Returning to Geneva, the car eventually came to rest where the journey had begun six days earlier.

We had covered hundreds of kilometres. Crossed some of Europe's finest mountain roads. Discovered villages we had never intended to visit. Stayed in hotels we had chosen only hours before arriving.

Yet when friends later asked us where we had been, I realised the destinations themselves somehow mattered less than the feeling they had left behind. It had never really been a tour of Switzerland. It had been a reminder that the finest journeys cannot always be planned.

Sometimes they begin with nothing more complicated than an old friend, an open road and the freedom to follow whichever direction curiosity chooses.

Looking back now, I cannot tell you exactly how many kilometres we travelled.

I can remember almost every bend in the road.

And every smile!