

**DEAR SUBSCRIBER**

November 26, 2000

**Our Man 'Rawja'**

Off and on for the past 14 years, a couple of globetrotting tour operators from Ohio, Roger Holliday and Claudia Fischer, have been *Gemütlichkeit* contributors. We'd prefer more "on" than "off" but it seems they're always headed off for the Australian Outback, a winter cruise above the Arctic Circle, or some Slovenian backwater. For example, earlier this year, while Claudia was taking cooking and language classes in Italy, Roger walked the entire 180-mile path (about six pubs per mile) along the Thames river.

Though we've worked with Holliday-Fischer for 14 years, we've only met them once, when they passed our way en route to yet another exotic destination. Thus our business relationship and friendship has developed almost entirely by telephone.

Speaking of which, you need hear no more than Roger's two word phone greeting, a soft, nasal, somewhat bored sounding, "Rawja Hauladay," to know you're dealing with a different breed of cat. A British cat, ecktuallly; but one who, for the first 10 years of his life, thought he was half Swiss. His "mum," you see, was born in Germany and during World War II, while her British husband was in the Army far away in India, the

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**This Month in Gemütlichkeit**

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# GEMÜTLICHKEIT

The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria, Switzerland & the New Europe

## SWISS WALKS

*This month our Fischer-Holliday duo, using three Swiss cities as a base of operations, lay out a series of easy to moderate mountain walks.*

**"E**xperience the Swiss Alps in all their breathtaking magnificence...unspoilt mountain forests, lush Alpine pastures, rushing mountain streams and valleys with their rich traditions stretching back hundreds of years..." "Oh no," we hear you *Gemütlichkeit* readers saying, "not another syrupy symphony to Switzerland; another paean to alpine perfection."

Actually, this sugarcoated hyperbole came not from us but from a brochure extolling the glammers of the Glacier Express and we sympathize wholeheartedly with the poor 'hackenflack' who had to pen these

words. For how do you honestly and accurately describe gobsmacking scenery? Crisp, clear, unpolluted mountain air. The broad palette of sky blues, turquoise lakes, mountain greens and forest fawn. How do you transfer the sweet smell of a forest pine from nose to prose without some scratch and sniff technology. Or the ubiquitous tolling of deep-throated cowbells absent sound systems from Bose or Blaupunkt. How in the world do you put into words the awesome overwhelm of the Ogre, the Monk and the Virgin for the average flatlander? Or explain to car-bound Yanks a Swiss public transportation system that seamlessly meshes

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## Silent Night Self-Tour

**W**hile hordes of tourists flow through Mozart's birthplace, and board buses for "Sound of Music" tours, relatively few connect the Salzburg area with the familiar Christmas carol, *Silent Night*. Even outside the holiday season, a self-guided "Silent Night" tour will reward many travelers. Visits to sites connected with the carol can deepen its meaning and offer both a realistic view of modern Austria and a strong sense of 18th century life.

**The Legend**

It was just two days before Christmas when the organ bellows rotted through at St. Nikolas Church in Oberndorf, 11 miles north of Salzburg. Knowing his congregation's love for music, the young

parish priest wrote a poem and asked the church organist and choirmaster to set it to music so they could sing it with guitar accompaniment at midnight Mass. In his study over the schoolhouse in the neighboring village of Arnsdorf, the organist gazed out the window onto the peaceful, snow-blown fields. Soon he started to hum slowly, then sing: "*Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht...*" — "Silent night, holy night..."

Just before Mass he trekked back to the church, where the two men practiced the hymn and taught the refrain to the choir. Shortly after midnight on Christmas Eve 1818, with organist Franz-Xaver Gruber singing bass and Father Josef Mohr singing tenor and accompanying on

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## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

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family lived in a small west England village. During the Battle of Britain, and for the duration of the war, being German wasn't very politically correct so mum told the world, her kids included, that she was Swiss — much less schoolyard hazing.

It wasn't until just after the war, when 10-year-old Roger began asking pointed questions about his mother's alleged hometown of Bern, that he discovered his heritage was German instead of Swiss.

Actually, Roger almost wasn't. In the mid-30s, shortly after his parents were married, with Roger's automotive journalist father-to-be on assignment in Germany, and his mother at home in England, the pair planned a weekend rendezvous in Freiburg, Germany. Small mix-up. Mr. Holliday reported for weekend duty as ordered at the agreed upon location but Mrs. Holliday wound up in Fribourg, Switzerland. Somehow it all got sorted out.

Such German-English marital alliances, of course, have some precedent; Victoria, the British monarch made a fine match with Albert of Sax-Coburg. (Vicky, though, seems to have won the endorsement battle; she got her name on an entire era, while Al had to settle for his picture on the side of a tobacco can — surely you remember the wiseguy crank phone call to the local corner store that began "Do you have Prince

Albert in the can?")

As the product of this international union, Roger seems none the worse for wear. All things considered, he's a bright, charming, witty fellow. There does, however, seem to be one small glitch. Not all the words he uses can be located in Webster's Collegiate or its German equivalent (Roger speaks fluent German). Some are simply made up in that fertile but quirky English/German/ex-Swiss brain of his.

Here, then, is a brief glossary of words you may puzzle over when reading this month's Fischer-Holliday story on Switzerland:

- **Hackenflack:** A flat out Holliday invention. Translates roughly to public relations flack touting destinations where German is the spoken language.

- **Gobsmacking:** Lower class Brit word meaning extraordinarily beautiful — just like it sounds.

- **Regenschrimy:** Holliday's attempt to turn the German noun *Regenschrim* (umbrella) into some sort of Anglicized adjective.

- **Experten:** Sounds German but is actually Holliday-English. The German word for expert in my *Langenscheidts* is *Fachmann*.

- **Shop-opping:** Untranslatable.

### Calling From Europe Revisited

Last month's brief discussion about the advisability of purchasing a cell phone in Europe apparently struck a nerve. A number of readers

emailed and called in their solutions to the phoning home problem.

One woman correctly pointed out that prepaid phone cards are readily available throughout Europe and charges for calls to the U.S. are relatively inexpensive. For example, with a **Swisscom** card the per minute price for calling within Switzerland, as well as from Switzerland back to the U.S., is 0.30 Sfr. or about 17 cents. The cards are available at shops everywhere in Switzerland or on the Web at [www.swisscom.com](http://www.swisscom.com). Similar cards are available in Austria and Germany.

Still, as a traveler, you'll probably need to be either in your hotel room or a phone booth to use a card, so it doesn't quite solve the problem for those who want to be able to initiate and receive calls anytime, anywhere. For that you need a cell phone.

Though some car rental agencies will loan you a phone at no charge, the calls themselves are frightfully expensive, usually more than \$2 per minute. Probably the best solution for those who travel to Europe with

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### Notes for Readers

- Foreign currency prices are converted to U.S. dollars at the exchange rate in effect at the time of publication.
- Hotel prices listed are for one night. Discounts are often available for longer stays.
- All hotel prices include breakfast unless otherwise noted.
- Local European telephone area codes carry the "0" required for in-country dialing. To phone establishments from outside the country, such as from the USA, do not dial the first "0".

Vol. 14, No. 11  
November, 2000

## GEMÜTLICHKEIT

The Travel Letter for Germany, Austria, Switzerland & the New Europe

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Gemütlichkeit (ISSN 10431756) is published monthly by UpCountry Publishing, 288 Ridge Road, Ashland OR 97520. TOLL FREE: 1-800/521-6722 or 541/488-8462, fax: 541/488-8468, e-mail [travet@gemut.com](mailto:travet@gemut.com). Web site: [www.gemut.com](http://www.gemut.com). Subscriptions are \$67 per year for 12 issues. While every effort is made to provide correct information in this publication, the publishers can make no guarantees regarding accuracy.

**POSTMASTER: SEND ADDRESS CHANGES TO:**  
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### HOTEL RESTAURANT RATING KEY

Rating Scale	Scale	Restaurant Criteria	
Excellent	16 - 20	Food	65%
Above Average	12 - 15	Service	20%
Average	8 - 11	Atmosphere	15%
Adequate	4 - 7		
Unacceptable	0 - 3		
Hotel Rating Criteria	Value Rating	Scale	
People/Service	30%	Outstanding Value	17 - 20
Location/Setting	15%	Very Good Value	12 - 16
Guestrooms	30%	Average Value	9 - 11
Public rooms	5%	Below Average Value	5 - 8
Facilities/Restaurant	20%	A Rip-Off	0 - 4

### Special Designation

By virtue of location, decor, charm, warmth of management, or combination thereof, an especially pleasant establishment.

## SWISS WALKS

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every one of its movable parts...like one of those multifunction Victorinox knives. Trains to buses. Buses to ferries. Ferries to cog rails. Cog rails to gondolas. Ad infinitum. And Rolex precise.

The answer is you don't. You can't. And because our monikers are Fischer and Holliday not Wordsworth or Twain, we're already in danger of outrunning our limited range of descriptive superlatives. In any case, regular readers of this newsletter are already familiar with the extraordinary sum total of natural wonders already crammed into and onto this tiny country the size of a West Virginia or a Wales.

Yes, indeed. Switzerland still remains the pretty and peaceful democracy it has been for 500 years. And, despite a few recent high-profile social and political blips, it's still practically perfect...and perfectly predictable.

So given all this, is it conceivable that in some ways Switzerland could be a bit *passe*, touristically speaking? A used-up chad, perhaps? A little long in the travelers' tooth? Tell a frequent Euroflieger, for example, that you're planning a Helvetian holiday and watch those eyes glaze over. Been there. Done that. "How about Turkey. Or Corsica. Or Singapore?" Or whatever the *Conde Nast* flavor of the month happens to be.

Frankly, for many years, we've been feeling a bit the same way. And despite a lock-box filled with quite delicious memories, we've also been bypassing or simply ignoring *die Schweiz* in favor of some of the more trendy destinations. But as we traveled the rest of the world, checking in and out of overpriced, overrun, over-hyped hotels, something kept tugging at our subconscious. Wistful visions of those small, intimate, family-owned and run Swiss hotels where everything works. Where the owners keep in contact over the years with a Christmas card or two. And where you know that on arrival you'll feel instantly *chez vous*, *zu*

*Hause*, at home.

Well, three of these treasures keep coming up every time we try to compile our list of all-time favorite digs. Three hotels. Three different styles. Three different stars.

And so we decided to "do" Switzerland once again. We put together a trip that would focus on these specific hostelrys and the happy families who live there; using them as bases from which to practice, in greater depth, another activity that has become increasingly vital to our travel lives...and to our ever bulging waistlines. Country walking a.k.a rambling a.k.a hiking.

It all started, this hiking business, several years ago when we happened to read about a low-key Swiss adventure (read "walk for softies") that actually allowed someone with zero to no experience...or special climbing equipment... to be lifted clear into high Alpine territory and then take an exquisite stroll along the roof the world. Closer to heaven than should be legally allowed. We followed instructions handed out by the Interlaken Tourist Office. Took a long, dreamy gondola ride from choc-box Grindelwald up to Männlichen — a spot, a plateau, a staging point 7,000 feet above the sea — then walked for an easy and totally unforgettable 90 minutes along a flat, groomed trail to a huddle of buildings called Kleine Scheidegg. We walked the path along with mums and dads. With strollers. And dogs. With knobbly-kneed *experten* in *Lederhosen mit* hiking poles. With seniors moving along at their own pace. And novitiates in trainers, like ourselves. With the long, the short and the tall of the rambling fraternity...all oohing and aahing at the 360 degrees of intoxicating scenery and specifically at the awesome vistas of the Eiger, the Monch and the Jungfrau. There are several ways to finish this walk. Return to Grindelwald via cable car, take a train ride down the other side of the mountain to Wengen...or, as we decided to do, walk down to Wengen, a fairly easy trek of two hours or so. The popular — and expensive — railway trip to

Jungfraujoch at 11,333 ft. departs from Kleine Scheidegg so it would be possible to combine the two experiences into one spectacular day. Needless to say, we were hooked. Instantly. And now, wherever we land...be it the Aussie outback, the Hebridean hinterland, Slovenian lake country...we always make sure we take at least one long walk on the wild side. Relatively speaking.

And now we've just returned from a fall fortnight blessed with outstanding weather, only two 'regenshrimy' days in 14 — but also bracketed on either end by some of the worst rainstorms the country has experienced in 50 years or more.

### Samedan

On this particular Swiss tour, the tiny village of Samedan in the Engadine Valley in the extreme southeast of the country, had to be our initial destination. It takes precisely 24 hours to get there from our house in Northwest Ohio. One car ride (to Detroit). Two airplanes. Three trains. And we're there. In Mrs. Morell's front parlor in the **Hotel Terminus**.

We first tumbled upon this modest but comfy hostelry some 10 years ago when we were searching for lodgings in nearby St. Moritz. It was off-season, late evening and there was no room at any inn. But the helpful tourist people in the next village of Celerina thought Frau Morell in Samedan might have a place for us. She did and we have been forever thankful. Now several years later, we firmly believe Samedan — and the Terminus, directly across from the train station — may well be the perfect soft landing for anyone visiting Switzerland for the first time...or the 10th.

First, the village itself is 16th century romantic...and Romansch. Totally unpretentious and pretty with pastel-painted houses accented in woods and wrought iron. Cobble streets, of course. And a simple 13th century **Church of St Peter** with a graceful tower and bells that charmingly chime your nights away...every 15 minutes!

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## SWISS WALKS

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There are several lodging options in Samedan, as you might expect from a village smack bang in ski country. Thirteen hotels with 525 beds, according to the local T.O., plus numerous apartments, B&B's and camping sites. While these are dominated physically...and fiscally..by the 4-star **Hotel Bernina**, the 2-star Terminus is ground zero and an *Editor's Choice* for us. Eighteen rooms, trimmed in light pine, spic 'n' span Swiss with views of snow capped peaks from every window over red and pink geraniumed flower boxes. Their well-run restaurant has all the usual hearty stuff. *Schnitzels*, *Rösti* and such. Simple. Substantial. And properly priced. But it's really the Morell family's efficient, no gush style and the overall *gemütlichkeit* of the place that makes it so irresistible. (The Terminus does not have an elevator.)

**Contact:** Hotel Terminus, CH-7503 Samedan, tel. +41 /081 /852 5336, fax 852-44-52, Family Morell-Kapeller  
**Daily rates:** Singles 98-107 Sfr. (\$54-\$59), doubles 190-204 Sfr. (\$106-\$113)

### An Engadine Walk

The walk we made from here, described in the Samedan Tourist Office handout as "a must for every guest to our region" was precisely as advertised. It focuses on a mountain called Muragl that towers over the valley.

A 40-minute walk from Samedan along the River Inn (the same river, incidentally, that eventually finds its way to Innsbruck) brings you to the Punt Muragl parking lot where a steep cable car ride (discounted with the Swiss Rail Pass) rises over 7,000 feet and plonks passengers right onto the terrace of the aptly named **Berghotel** (rooms and food available) with simply staggering views over the Engadine Valley with its string of blue, blue lakes and eagle-eyed views of St. Moritz, Pontresina and Samedan.

While there are two optional walks from here, the easier...and the

one we chose...was on a fairly flat and well prepared trail that took us all around the mountainside. Ninety minutes of breathtaking valley scenery interrupted only by the ritualized and obligatory greetings of *Grüss Gott* or *Grütsi Miteinander* to oncoming walkers, Kodak photo ops at every bend, the intoxicating scents from the occasional pine and the odd rumble of a waterfall.

The first hour or so of the walk was, again, virtually effortless, as evidenced by the families comprised of the old, the young and even the halt and lame on occasion. Who goes up must, unfortunately at some point, also go down.

One option at the end was a steep uphill slog to Alp Languard and a chairlift to Pontresina...or a long hour's sometimes slippery and serpentine descent to the valley floor which required some very heavy breathing, the use of our indispensable Leki hiking poles...and two very strong drafts of Fischer's best brew at the end...before taking the short train ride back to Samedan. Next time the chairlift...but the experience reinforced everything we remembered about Swiss high-country hiking. Easy access. Well groomed, safe trails. Excellent way signs with distances and difficulty measures. And incomparable scenery.

### Interlaken

You don't really go to Interlaken for its earthly pleasures. A bit too much kitsch and shop-opping these days. But for us, a couple of things make this resort town between two lakes "worth a journey." Its unbeatable location as the gateway to the Bernese Oberland...and the **Hotel Krebs**.

While the Krebs, another indisputable *Editor's Choice* in our view, doesn't get many mentions in the travel guides, perhaps because it closes between October and April (snow folk sleep closer to their slopes), we continue to be massively impressed by everything about this special place.

The Krebs is on Bahnhofstrasse, less than 200 yards from the Interlak-

en West station making it a good base for excursions. The public rooms are charming with polished wood floors, oriental rugs, antique furniture in cozy groupings and lots of greenery.

The 42 guestrooms in this 4-star hotel are all individually decorated and comfortably furnished. The breakfast buffet, served in the pretty dining room, is both elaborate and delicious. But as with all our favorite Swiss hotels, the people are the key element at the Krebs, beginning with Marianne Koschak-Krebs, fourth generation owner and her charming husband, Peter.

An unexpected bonus for a hotel of this size and price range is the concierge, Alberto, from Assisi. In his 33 years with the family, Alberto has accumulated a wealth of information about everything from country walks and folkloric evenings to train and postbus schedules.

**Daily Rates:** Singles 124-178 Sfr. (\$69-\$99), doubles 190-294 Sfr. (\$106-\$163)

**Contact:** Hotel Krebs, Bahnhofstrasse 4, CH-3800 Interlaken, Tel. +41 /033 /822 7161, fax 823 2465, email: hotelkrebs@bluewin.ch, Web www.krebshotel.ch, Peter and Marianne Koschak

### Schynige Platte Walk

While the walking possibilities out of Interlaken are seemingly endless — you have only to look at the yellow directional signs in the middle of town or check in at the tourist office to find that out — we have a couple of suggestions above and beyond that original Männlichen/Scheidegg experience. (We do recommend that you always check out the weather of any mountain you're planning to visit...before you set out. The hotel TV sets have a channel that allows you to monitor conditions topside which can be very different from those at ground zero.)

The first is the classic **Schynige Platte**. Three stars from the Michelin Man. The same from us. And whether you're going out for some fairly rigorous exercise....or just to hang out and breathe in the stupendous

views...the pretty little village of Wilderswil is the jumping off point, reachable either by train from Interlaken Ost, bus #5 from Interlaken West car park or via a pleasant 45-minute stroll through woods and farm country.

From that busy little station, a rack railway carries you skywards for the better part of an hour before turning everyone out onto the Schynige Platte station...with its own refreshment stand and a curious little store selling mountain gear; hiking boots, poles and the like.

Above one end of the station is a large sunny hotel terrace where you can inhale your 'kaffee und kuchen' at 6,800 feet with stupendous views over the Jungfrau Massif; on the other end is an **Alpine Botanical Garden** filled with local flora. Either of which would be enough to make the whole trip worthwhile. But for anyone with breath left in their lungs, a little oompf in their legs and some decent foot gear, there's a simply brilliant "panoramic trail" that circles the summit for two hours. The first ten minutes or so...straight up...are a bit of a struggle, but then drop-dead views back down over Lake Brienz where the ferries look like toys in a bath tub, make all that heavy breathing well worth while. The rest of the invigorating walk doesn't disappoint either.

### **Grindelwald First Walk**

Grindelwald, a short train ride from Interlaken, is the starting point for yet another fair weather classic that can be either active or passive, depending on your particular disposition or energy level. A cable car a few hundred meters up from the train station takes about 20 minutes in three steep stages up 6,600 ft. to the very top of the First mountain-side — a viewing table and hotel that overlooks the Grindelwald basin, the Schreckhorn and of course, the Eiger peaks. Sit up here and enjoy the scenery. And cable car back down. Take an easy and popular hour-long walk along the ridge to an alpine lake called the Bachsee. Or decide as we did — with not a little trepidation — to walk all the way back down to

Grindelwald. Three knee-wearing but gorgeous hours through story-book country with unexpected loud bangs and booms off in the distance...provided by the Swiss army using the Eiger for artillery practice!

### **Easy Walk in the Lauterbrunnen Valley**

If all this sounds a bit over the top, a bit too vigorous., there's a lovely leisurely option for Everyman through the Lauterbrunnen Valley. It incorporates peaceful alpine scenes, a famous mountain resort, a heartstopping cable car descent and concludes with a thunderous waterfall.

Take the train from Interlaken to Lauterbrunnen, meeting up with a funicular spectacular that whisks straight up a shockingly steep 61% grade cliff-side to Grütschalp (altitude 4,879 ft).

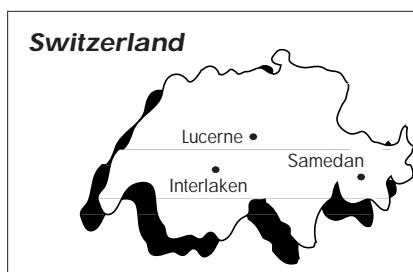
From there either take a 13-minute scenic mountain railway along the ridge to the resort village of Mürren — with yet even more fantastic views of the Eiger, Monch and Jungfrau — or walk there at a leisurely one hour and 30-minute rate over a wide, flat footpath that parallels the railway track.

Mürren itself is an attractive, small, car-free ski center where an Englishman named Arnold Lunn once invented the slalom. From there, you can follow a winding paved road down another two miles to the tiny farm hamlet of Gimmelwald. All cowbells. And pastures. And wooden houses *mit Blumen*.

From Gimmelwald, a cable car makes an eyepopping plunge off the edge of a cliff down to the Lauterbrunnen Valley floor. Next, a short bus ride on to the famous Trümmelbach Falls...where boiling cauldrons of rushing water corkscrew down through the valley walls at 20,000 liters a second. An elevator and a stepped catwalk take you right into the heat of the action. A bus goes back to Lauterbrunnen.

### Lucerne

If there's a hotel that personifies and glorifies a city, it has to be the **Rebstock** in Lucerne. And its personable owner, Claudia Moser. The



Rebstock has many wonderful qualities, not the least of which is the easy 10-minute walk to the train station.

The hotel is situated on a square next to the Cathedral of St. Ledger, the patron saint of Lucerne. And the building itself, which housed a vintners' guildhall in 1443, is an officially recognized Swiss landmark and full of interesting nooks and crannies. The guest rooms, not surprisingly, come in many shapes and sizes. A few are on the small side with standard double beds. But each is decorated with style and flair, combining modern art and bold colors with well-chosen antiques. Even the bathroom tiles and towels fit into the color scheme.

Although there is an elevator, its use necessitates walking up a half flight of stairs. There are three excellent restaurants in the hotel serving traditional Swiss food with contemporary twists: a formal dining room, a bistro/cafe, and an informal lunch room that looks out over the street through wide glass windows. This is also where the breakfast buffet is served which includes eggs cooked to order.

Frau Moser, the longtime owner, is responsible for the decor and the daily operations and she is as unique as her hotel. During our stay she struck up a discussion about the then upcoming U.S. elections with every American who stayed in the hotel. Clearly fascinated by the process, she was anxious to know what each of us thought. Of course, since then we've stayed in fax contact with her to continue the exchange.

**Contact:** Hotel zum Rebstock Claudia Moser St. Leodegar Strasse 3 CH-6006 Lucerne Phone 011-41-41-410-35-81 Fax 011-41-41-410-39-17

**Daily rates:** Singles 170-200 Sfr.

## SWISS WALKS

*Continued from page 5*

(\$94-\$111), doubles 250-320 Sfr.  
(\$139-\$178)

### Lucerne Mountain Walks

The hiking excursions from Lucerne are limitless. This is, after all, William Tell country. And the region's transport links are splendid with fleets of steamers and plenty of rack railways to take you off the beaten path. The best-known mountain tops — Pilatus and Rigi — are no less accessible and it was the Rigi that we chose for our wild side walk.

After two days of rain, the weather forecasts were promising a clear patch, so we took an early morning ferry from Lucerne to Vitznau and connected with Europe's oldest rack railway...vintage 1871 and 25% discounted with our indispensable Swiss Pass...for the long 1,800 meter climb to Rigi Kulm.

Most of the journey was through a thick layer of cloud but just as we reached the summit station, we broke through into clear sunshine giving us a simply stunning panoramic view of snowy peaks poking out of a thick sea of fluffy white clouds...the whole Alpine range...from end to end. There are easy walks all over the Rigi among woods and pastures...and the sunrise seen from the mountain top has apparently brought tearful exultations from generations of travelers...including Victor Hugo.

While the clouds and mist blanketing the lower reaches of the mountain didn't allow us to experience Rigi at its all-time best, the five-hour trek back down to Gersau for the ferry was exceptional enough for us to proclaim that, like General McArthur..."We shall return!"

#### Equipment & Fitness

**Equipment:** All of the walks described, with the exception of Rigi Kulm, can be accomplished in decent weather with a pair of sturdy trainers and a light jacket. In a perfect world, however, we would recommend the following:

- A good pair of waterproof

walking shoes or boots with good traction

- A waterproof jacket.
- A hat to keep out the sun/rain
- Sunscreen
- A walking stick or collapsible hiking pole
- A daypack for an extra sweater, camera, water bottle and binoculars.

**Fitness:** While most of these walks can be handled by anyone of limited experience or fitness level, we still recommend potential country rambles begin a moderate exercise program at least three months before leaving home.

#### Web Sites

##### CIA Factbook 2000:

- [www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sz.html](http://www.odci.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/sz.html)

##### About Switzerland:

- [www.about.ch](http://www.about.ch)
- [ch.swissvisit.com](http://ch.swissvisit.com)
- [www.myswitzerland.com](http://www.myswitzerland.com)
- [www.sbb.ch/index\\_e.htm](http://www.sbb.ch/index_e.htm)

##### Lonely Planet:

- [www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/europe/switzerland/](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations/europe/switzerland/) 

## SILENT NIGHT TOUR

*Continued from page 1*

the guitar, the touching melody and words of what arguably has become the world's best-known Christmas song, were heard for the first time.

### Salzburg, Mohr's birthplace

Our self-tour starts in Salzburg, where Josef Mohr was born out of wedlock and into poverty on December 11, 1792, the son of a seamstress and a military deserter. His birthplace and childhood home still stands at Number 9 Steingasse (although recent research suggests it was Number 11), a four-story tenement on a well-preserved medieval street. Marked only by a small plaque, the building nestles between the right bank of the Salzach and the 2,100-foot **Kapuzinerberg** in the New City, the eastern part of Salzburg, built primarily after the 16th century.

It's likely young Josef escaped the poverty of his youth by climbing the narrow, stepped walkway that enters the Steingasse beside his house and

weaves through medieval fortifications to the Capuchin friary atop the mountain. Here Josef (and today's traveler) could look out over the riches of Salzburg and into Bavaria beyond.

The view to the Old City on the left bank is postcard-perfect and has changed little in the past two centuries. The **Hohensalzburg** fortress, finished in 1681 after six centuries of construction, dominates the panorama, towering over the city's baroque spires.

Mohr could reach school or church in the old city in minutes via one of many bridges to the western bank. It's easy to retrace his steps. The shortest way to the massive Renaissance cathedral — or **Dom** — where he sang and was later ordained, would have taken him over the river, past the 15th century town hall and **Mozart's Birthplace** (not celebrated as such until decades later) on the famed **Getreidegasse**. From there, he walked through the wafting scents of the old market — still active today — and past the **Residenz**, palatial home to the ruling archbishops, into the **Domplatz** to the cathedral.

It's only a few more steps to the adjacent **St. Peter's** cloister, where Mohr celebrated his first Mass. Rebuilt in the 17th and 18th centuries in Baroque style, the church borders ancient Christian catacombs and a cemetery where Mozart's sister Nannerl is buried. The cloister also houses Austria's oldest restaurant, the **Peterskeller**, established by Benedictine monks in 803 and frequented by Mohr.

It's an invigorating climb from St. Peter's up winding pathways to the top of the **Mönchsberg**, the 400-foot high hill that stretches from the Hohensalzburg nearly two miles along the old city. (Other options to the top include a funicular railway and an elevator.) The walker is rewarded with commanding views of the Alps to the south and the old and new cities and the Kapuzinerberg to the east. To the north, the Salzach glimmers as it makes its way



11 miles downstream to Oberndorf, where Mohr moved in 1817 to serve as assistant pastor at St. Nikolas.

### **Oberndorf**

He traveled to his new assignment by riverboat, a common means of transportation in 1817. Today, a local narrow-gauge railway offers a less precarious option, and many summertime tourists rent bicycles and follow a riverbank path.

Mohr's old church fell to floods nearly a century ago, but the **Stille-Nacht-Kapelle**, the small memorial chapel completed in 1937, stands on the site. Inside, candles flicker and fresh flowers lie before a wood-carved nativity scene and altar. A guest-book reveals visitors from around the world. Light filters through two stained-glass windows, one depicting Mohr and the old church, the other Gruber and the Arnsdorf schoolhouse. The "new" church, down the street and behind a brass memorial to the two men, contains statues and altar paintings from the original church, while the town museum houses a new exhibit dedicated to the carol.

### **Arnsdorf: Home of Franz Gruber**

It's minutes by car or bus, or an hour's walk to Arnsdorf, still a tiny village consisting of a church, a schoolhouse and a few homes. Franz Gruber took his first teaching job here in 1807, living upstairs in the schoolhouse with the first and second of his three wives (not at the same time). He played guitar, violin and organ, a joy he shared daily with the young farm children.

The musical spirit lingers. On a recent visit to the schoolhouse, the sounds of children singing Austrian folk songs and the rhythmic strumming of a guitar echoed down its hardwood floors and white plaster walls. Except for nylon parkas draped on wooden pegs, the year might have been 1818.

The apartment that served as Gruber's home is now a museum with furniture from the early 1800s, much of it Gruber's. The small bed, a guide points out with a wink, may explain why Gruber had 12 children.

### **Hallein: Gruber Home and Grave**

In 1833, Gruber took a position at the 13th-century **Dekanats Church** in the larger town of Hallein, about 10 miles south of Salzburg. A short walk from the town center (following signs *Zum Grubergrab*) passes tall, well-kept 17th and 18th century houses along open squares and narrow, cobblestone streets.

A small plaza fronts the plain house where Gruber lived and died. Though the church cemetery was moved, Gruber — who died in 1863 at age 75 — still lies between the house and the church in the original family plot; a wrought-iron cross marks the grave. A few years ago, the town restored the apartment and turned it into the **Gruber Museum**.

### **Wagrain: Mohr's Last Years**

Franz-Xaver Gruber's story ends in Hallein, but our tour continues 20 miles south to the village of Wagrain, where, for 21 years until his death in 1848, Josef Mohr served as parish priest. In that time, Mohr championed the causes of the disadvantaged, the young and the elderly, and the village still honors his memory, not just as the *Silent Night* composer but as a social reformer. Eight years ago, as part of his 200th birthday celebration, the village established an exhibit devoted to his memory. Visitors can pass by the parish house where he lived. He earned living expenses using the adjacent farmland and orchards that still bear fruit.

Mohr's gravesite is at the entrance to the 700-year-old parish church and in view of the **Josef Mohr School** and the **Josef Mohr Home for the Aged**, both built with funds raised by him more than 150 years ago. On December 11, the priest's birthday, crowds gather at the grave to hear children honor him with song. A memorial concert and sing-along also take place in the church on December 26.

Not all of the old priest is buried in Wagrain. To mark the 100th anniversary of *Silent Night*, the village commissioned a statue. Lacking any portraits, his coffin was exhumed and his skull sent to Vienna, where a

suggested likeness was drawn and given to the sculptor. Both the memorial and skull ended up in Oberndorf — the memorial in front of the new church, the skull under the altar in the memorial chapel.

Behind the church, farmhouses perch on distant hills. Late one night, just before Christmas, Father Mohr was summoned there to give last rites. While returning, the 55-year-old priest became snowbound for several hours. He fell ill and died four weeks later of a lung infection.

### **The Story Continues**

*Silent Night* passed to the world thanks to the organ builder who came to repair St. Nikolas' instrument. He brought the carol back to his home in the village of Fügen not far from Innsbruck, nearly 200 miles away. The following Christmas it was performed by two family singing groups (forerunners to the Von Trapps), who later toured Europe, England and Russia with the song in their repertoire as a "Tirolian folksong." One of the groups brought the song to America, performing in New York on December 24, 1839. It wasn't until 1854, six years after Mohr's death, that the two composers received credit for their work.

Fügen has commemorated its role in starting the carol's spread across the globe — it's been translated into nearly 200 languages — by marking the homes of the organ builder and both families and setting aside part of the village museum.

### **Getting Around**

Using Salzburg as a base, easy daytrips can be made to Oberndorf and Arnsdorf to the north, and Hallein and Wagrain to the south.

Trains run almost hourly from the Salzburg Lokalbahn (next to the main station) to Oberndorf. The 25-minute trip costs about \$3 each way. It's a delightful one-hour walk from Oberndorf to Arnsdorf, although taxi service is available.

Hallein, about 10 minutes from Salzburg, is easily reached by trains that leave the main station twice hourly. St. Johann im Pongau, the

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## SILENT NIGHT TOUR

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train station closest to Wagrain, lies another 50 minutes south along the same line. Purchase a round-trip ticket from Salzburg to St. Johann (about \$14), stop off in Hallein, and catch a later train to St. Johann. From St. Johann, travel by bus or taxi steeply uphill to Wagrain.

### Accommodations

As a "Silent Night" home base, Salzburg has an abundance of hotels, inns and pensions. The outlying "stops" offer many options as well.

#### Wagrain

**Landhof Kreuzsalgut**, a working farm, features modern vacation apartments, farm animals and hiking trails on the rural outskirts of the village. A two-room apartment costs about \$70 per night. Contact Familie Pusswald-Ganschitter, Floitensberg 10, A-5602 Wagrain; tel. +43/6413/87663; email: maria.pusswald@eunet.at

#### Hallein

The **Auwirt** is a small hotel perched on Bad Dürrenberg, a high plateau above Hallein, accessible by car or gondola. The property includes meadows, springs, woodlands and a petting zoo. A double with private bath costs about \$70. Contact Fam. Reiter, Salzachtal-Bundesstraße Nord 24, A-5400 Hallein; tel. +43/6245/80417; email: auwirt@aon.at.

**Schloss Haunspurg** is a 14<sup>th</sup> century country manor with eight double rooms, as well as suites with period furniture. Doubles range from \$100-\$125. Contact Schloss Haunspurg, Hammerstrasse 32, A-5411 Oberalm bei Hallein; tel. +43/6245/80662; email: info@schlosshaunspurg.com.

#### Oberndorf

The village of Anthering is four short train stops south of Oberndorf and home to the **Hammerschmiede**, an old smithy and residence. Hidden deep in a nature preserve and bird sanctuary, the smithy is now a museum and the residence a four-star country hotel and restaurant. Dou-

bles range from \$80-\$100. The hotel provides free transfers from the nearby train station. Contact Hotel im Wald Hammerschmiede, Acharting 22, A-5102 Anthering bei Salzburg; tel. +43/6223/2503; email: info@hammerschmiede.at, Web: www.hammerschmiede.co.at/hm/.

**Tourist Info:** Since all locations fall within the Province of Salzburg, the SalzburgerLand Tourism Office offers a wealth of information: A-5300 Hallwang/Salzburg; tel. +43/662/6688; email: info@szgtour.co.at. Local travel bureaus are at wagrain@holidayinfo.com and at office@hallein-tourism.at. ☒

## DEAR SUBSCRIBER

Continued from page 2

any frequency at all, is to buy a phone that works there. One reader told me he recently purchased **Nex-tel's i2000** phone for \$259. It works in 65 countries, including the U.S. and western Europe. **Ericsson's T28 World Phone** is \$299, very small, weighs less than three ounces, and operates in 120 countries. However, the phone won't switch to analog from digital so when you go outside a GSM area you get no signal.

The best solution right now — in Germany at least — is to purchase a prepaid wireless phone (called a "Handy" in Germany) that includes calling time. According to the Website, **The German Way** (www.german-way.com), you can buy a decent cell phone for 99 DM (\$43) that comes with 25 DM (\$11) of calls. The per minute rate is 1.69 DM (73 cents) but you can designate one frequently called number for which the rate is 39 pfennigs (17 cents). A German address is not required. You may also be able use your U.S. cell phone number with these phones. This is an informative Website, I recommend it. — RHB ☒

## Europe Travel Briefs

■ **KD River Cruises** is offering an **early-booking discount of 10%** on cruises if paid in full by December

31, 2000. The discount applies to cruises on the Rhine, Main, Mosel, Saar, Elbe, Danube and the Main-Danube Canal. Additional discounts of 20% for April sailings and 10% for October cruises are also available. KD cruises can be booked through your local travel agent or directly with KD River Cruises, tel. 800-346-6525, email: info@rivercruises; Web: www.rivercruises.com.

■ **Rail Europe** has introduced a new **German Rail 'n' Drive Pass** combining two days unlimited train travel and two days Avis rental car within a one month period, using either first or second class rail and a choice of economy, compact, intermediate or compact automatic vehicles.

For two adults, per person prices range from \$145, using second class rail and an economy car, to \$209 for first class rail and a compact automatic transmission car. Prices are slightly higher for one adult traveling alone. Additional rail days (up to three) are \$50 in first class or \$42 second class; price of additional car days depends on car size and type of transmission.

Prior to purchase we recommend a comparison of the cost of a Rail 'n' Drive with separate purchases of rail passes and auto rental. To book, phone 800-521-6722. ☒

### Key Websites for the Traveler to Germany, Austria & Switzerland

- **www.gemut.com** Gateway site for travelers to Germanic Europe, including car rental, rail passes, hotel bookings, traveler feedback, free travel advice and past issues (\$4 per month fee for access to 8 years of back issues).
- **www.michelin-travel.com** The Michelin database of hotels and restaurants plus great interactive trip planning tools.
- **www.mapblast.com** Map and automobile trip planning. Locates routes and distances.
- **bahn.hafas.de/bin/query.exe/en** German rail. Train schedules throughout Europe, not just Germany.
- **www.sbb.ch/index\_e.htm** Swiss and European rail schedules.
- **www.switzerlandtourism.com** Website of Switzerland's national tourist authority.
- **www.germany-tourism.de** Germany's national tourist authority.
- **www.anto.com** Austria's national tourist authority. ☒