

12/7/23

2017 Transatlantic Cruise

Geneva Trip April 14 – April 19, 2017

Friday, April 14

Got up early for our 11:55am Alitalia flight from Rome to Geneva. Had a continental breakfast at the hotel. Then caught the free hotel shuttle to the airport at 8am.

We were told that check in for Alitalia was the line that extended through the terminal. An Alitalia employee saw Larue with a cane, and asked if she needed wheelchair assistance. She then pointed to an open counter that was just for people needing assistance. Checked in quickly and waited in reserved seating until the wheelchair person arrived. Then away we went through security. Good thing for the wheelchair, as our gate B27 was the very last gate in the concourse. Got there, and was put in a reserved area while the attendant checked us in with the gate attendant. Larue was ready with a tip, and he refused it. At boarding time an attendant took us to a van and drove us a mile or two to where the plane was parked. Great service all around, and no tipping allowed.

Nice flight from Rome. I requested a window seat on the right side. I wanted to see the Alps, and the approach to Geneva. Larue had the aisle. Lucky for us the flight was not full, and nobody was in the middle seat.

It was a beautiful sunny clear day all the way. We flew by Mont Blanc, Chamonix. France, then on to Geneva. The snowy Alps were awesome. The approach was over Lake Geneva, and I spotted the castle in Coppet. From there I was able to track the road we lived on, and the group of houses. Just couldn't pick out our house, since there are a few more. Still a lot of green area around.

The Geneva airport was very familiar. The wheelchair person got us to the baggage claim, and it was crowded.

Andreas said he would meet us, and I am scanning people to no avail. The wheelchair attendant went off to have him paged. About then a white haired guy looked at me, and I looked at him. I said, "Andreas?", and it was him. Before that I had been watching a guy that had black hair, the way I remembered Andreas, but he was not responding.

It was a great reunion. Andreas got Nils Buss on the phone while we were still in the airport. We will all meet for lunch, Monday. Andreas drove us to our hotel over the border in France. It was the way I used to drive to work at CERN. It was very familiar, and has not changed all that much. We passed by our old eating and watering hole, Café Du La Place. It looked the same. The same with CERN. I could have driven in and went to work. I could see my office from the road.

We were too early to check in our hotel. We went into the restaurant to get something to eat, and a beer for old times.

Had a mixup on our reservation. We didn't have one, but got a room.

We are on our own tonight. Andreas has some family stuff, being it is Good Friday. He will join us for breakfast in the morning, and take us back to the airport to pick up a rental car. He is the same old Andreas "Grimsky" Grimm, and a great guy. This is all like a dream.

I saw a small supermarket about a block away. I hobbled along and got a bottle of French Cabernet for 3 euros. A little over \$3.

So, a quiet evening in our little country hotel in France.

Had dinner in the hotel restaurant with a limited menu. It was a 2 plate du jour, or a 3 plate du jour, with 3 options for each plate. I went for the 2 plate at 15 euros. I had a nice cold plate of ham, salami, tomatoes, and the salmon plate with rice. Larue had the 2 plate option with a salad, and the beef plate with fries. Not great but not bad.

Saturday, April 15

We got a continental breakfast (extra cost of 9 euros each) with our room. Andreas joined us for breakfast at 9am. He arrived with an Easter basket for us. It had a large chocolate bunny, small chocolate eggs, and two easter eggs that he boiled, and colored himself. It was all in a basket with fake grass and everything. We had a great visit, and he really enjoyed the breakfast.

We feel that our traveling here has invigorated him. He is 73, and has not been doing much, to the consternation of his 3 kids. He said after talking to us, and seeing us still going, he feels that he should get going again. We think he will.

After breakfast he drove us to the airport, so we could pick up our rental car. The airport was mobbed with Easter travelers, so he went through the "kiss and leave" lane. He dropped us off in front of the terminal. Found the Hertz/Thrifty counter, and were told our reservation was for the French side of the airport! I am thinking the opposite side of the airport, where I know it is France. The reservation clearly stated Geneva Airport, but to no avail.

We have to go to France, and he said it is just a short walk! We are thinking probably a mile or two. It was the other end of the terminal through a door with France on it. You pass through customs (just walk through), and there is the rental counter. The car was outside the door, but not in the slot we were told.

It was an easy exit from the airport with no traffic. Way better way to go, if you fly into Geneva, and rent a car. Per the car rental lady, we need to buy a permit to travel on Swiss roads. She said to stop and get it at the customs building when we get to the freeway. Get there and there are no signs. They are waving all cars straight through.

Drove through and found a place to park. Walked back checking for signs and doors to no avail. Got the attention of an officer in the center island. He waved me over. Yes, he could sell me the pass for 30 Swiss Francs (a little over \$30). The pass is required, since the car has French plates on it. Do not know how long it is valid. It has a

big 17 that might be the year it is valid. Looking at the residue on the windshield it appears they remove the sticker each time the car is returned. Appears to be a rip off, but you do what you gotta do.

With that done we return to the hotel the way Andreas took us. Missed an exit, and wandered around for a while, but we made it. Had a near miss in a busy round-a-bout when a guy came shooting across in front of us. The car radar warning went off, and alerted us. Drivers here are really impatient. They are quick to honk the horn, and flash their lights. Andreas got a lot of honks as he drives slow. He is not the wild guy of the old days.

Regrouped at the hotel and decided to travel through the French countryside to go out to where we lived. Lots of round- a-bouts, which had us both concentrating trying to read the signs to get the proper exit. Got to Divonne, France, after about 20km, and crossed over into Switzerland. Then 2km down to Coppet.

The Motel De Founex, where we stayed several weeks, is now an empty lot. Found our road, the Route de Founex, and started looking.

A lot more new houses, and we ended up going too far. We saw the old wooden gate. now painted white. There were big high shrubs about 10 feet high between the house and the road. Stopped in front, and took pictures. I wanted to ring the bell on the gate, but Larue said no.

Drove down a new road on the side of the property. Three or four big houses are now on the two acres or so of back property that I had to keep manicured.

A large school was built on the farmer's field that was across from the house. It was getting late in the afternoon. We wanted to get something to eat in Coppet. The main street is narrow, with hardly enough room for two cars to pass, and no parking. Found a little lot and parked. Coppet hasn't thrived, and no place to eat. The little butcher shop where Larue bought meat was still there and operating. The little drug store next to it, where Larue rubbed elbows with Richard Burton was gone.

We decided to drive the lake front route to Versoix. The eating places were all closed, so headed back across to France. Finally figured out that restaurants close for Easter week. Saw a Turkish restaurant open, and shared a plate of chicken kabobs, salad, and rice at 4pm. So, we had Turkish food in France with the Muslims. Headed for the hotel and stopped at the supermarket, to buy some snacks, for the evening.

Interesting thing about the supermarkets is that the prices are electronic digital displays. They are a bit hard to read depending on the lighting and your angle. Nice market with a great wine selection. A lot of prepared food, all packaged, and ready to go.

It seems strange with all the immigration problems, and terrorist activity, that there is no stopping or checks at the border crossings. When we arrived in Geneva, 40 years ago, the first people we saw when we got off the plane were two soldiers with Uzi machine guns pointed at us. This time we saw nobody, and walked straight through the "Nothing to Declare" line. No wonder the terrorists travel around freely.

It was a good day. We were very pleased to see our old house. We were lucky to have such a big place. Tomorrow, being Easter Sunday, the traffic will be light. We will venture into downtown Geneva.

Sunday, April 16 Easter

After breakfast we headed for downtown Geneva. Traffic was not bad. We ended up on the lake by the jet d'eau, and the older high end hotels and shops. Then turned up towards the train station where the going got mixed up. Ended up in the lanes for busses, and trams, in front of the train station. The only option was to keep going. Lucky that no trams were coming at us.

Made it through and decided to get out of the city. Got on the freeway (auto route) headed to Lausanne. This is the route I used to travel to get to work and home. It is still two lanes in both directions. Not much different, except for bigger trees, and more vegetation.

Went by our old exit, and continued on to the exit for Nyon. Went through Nyon to the lake, and headed back towards Geneva.

Passed through Coppet and went by the house again before continuing towards Geneva. Passing through Versoix we saw a sign pointing to the College Du Lemman, where the kids went to school. We turned off, and found the school. I took a lot of pictures. Really changed, gotten much larger, and couldn't recognize much.

We continued along the lake looking for a place to eat. In Bellevue, we spotted an auberge on the lake (one that I remember) that was open. Found a place to park and went in noticing that it had a pricey menu posted outside. Being Easter Sunday, it was a single fixed price lunch at 75 Swiss Francs per person (close to \$80 per person). We declined, and continued on.

We crossed back over into France. It was getting towards 2pm when we found an Indian restaurant open. Not what we wanted, but decided to take what was available. It was a nice place, and moderately priced. We each had a green salad. Larue had a spicy lentil soup, and minced lamb kebobs. I had peppered chicken tikka, which was peppered chicken prepared like kebobs. With two beers we got by for the total of about \$50. So, we had lunch in France on Easter with the Hindu crowd. We are really getting diversified.

I was ready to stop at the first McDonalds we saw, but did not see any, or any other fastfood places. We have only seen one since we have been here. After lunch we just winged it. We took the exit on the round-a-bouts, that was going the direction we needed to go, and eventually came to our hotel about 3:30pm. It was a cool and cloudy day, but did not rain.

Dinner time we headed out to find a place to eat. We had seen, "Charlies Pub", about two miles up the road, and headed there. Got parked and went in, but no food there. Went on a couple of blocks, and saw a Chinese place. Did not really want chinese food, but decided we better take what is available. Excellent fresh stuff, and even had a section with raw fish, raw shrimp, and raw beef. So, we had Chinese for dinner in France with a bunch of foreign people, and we really stood out. So far. the only French food we have had is in

our hotel with the limited menu on our first night. They were closed because of Easter Sunday. The Chinese buffet was excellent, and we got by for about \$50.

Monday April 17

Had lunch scheduled with Andreas, Nils, and his wife Lena at a place they know out in the country. It is in the lower Jura mountains in Bretigny. It is out past where we lived. Andreas picked us up at 11am.

We had to pass near where Nils and Lena live . Andreas wanted to run us by their apartment building, as that is where his son lives also. We stopped and were looking the place over when Nils and Lena drove out of the parking garage. So, we followed them onto the auto route. We traveled past Coppet , and turned off towards the Jura mountains. The restaurant was very Swiss.

We all had a salad, and I said I had to have filet de perche, as the Geneva area is known for it. Nils, Andreas, and Larue ordered filet de perch also. Lena had a starter plate of ham and asparagus with a hollandaise sauce. The servings were huge. Larue had to have a coup d'Denmark for dessert, as that is what the kids always had to have. Lena did as well. The chocolate as well as the ice cream was superb. Nils said the menu prices were moderate, but the total bill, with only four beers came to \$200. I treated.

Nils wanted us to go back to their apartment,,which we did. Very small modern apartment. The rent is \$2000 per month for about 500 sq ft.

Nils is a fountain of knowledge on where everybody is. Caught up on what took place over the last 40 years. I asked about a CERN employee, Eric McIntosh, and Nils said he lives nearby, and he sees him often. He called Eric, and we will meet tomorrow for lunch at our old watering hole.

Nils was the same old Nils, and has hardly changed. He always reminded me of a little Swedish spy, walking around thinking, with his hands in his pockets gathering information. He was my eyes and

ears on the politics, and what was going on at CERN. He still knows everything that is going on, and it is stored in there somewhere. Even filled us in on the politics, and bad decisions, in the building of the super collider at CERN.

Andreas dropped us off at the hotel about 5pm. Larue asked him to dry run us to the car rental return in the French side of the Geneva airport. I already had it mapped out in my mind, but was not quite sure of the last exit. We took off, and he went totally opposite of my way, on a much longer route. We were a little lost, but finally got there. I got the final exit question resolved. We turned around to head back to the hotel, and he said, "now we will try your route". He missed a couple of exits on the round-a-bouts. We got lost, and were all over the place. Took about an hour to return. Saw a lot of the French sector, however.

Got back to our hotel, and decided to relax, and eat in the hotel restaurant. Get down there and they are still closed for the Easter holiday. Rather than get back out on the roads in the dark, we bagged it for the night. We had a few munchies for such times.

Tuesday April 18

Met Andreas, Nils, and Eric McIntosh (and old friend and CERN manager), for lunch at a small place near the entrance to CERN, as Eric is still working. Eric is 75 and one of the old gang. Our association was close as he was one of the main guys running the computer center. He was in the group of CERN management that I took to Control Data Headquarters in early 1978 for a corporate visit. Through a little collusion he wanted to visit the INEL computer center in Idaho Falls, and I was happy to set up the visit. So, he and I went to Idaho Falls. When he saw me that was the first thing he wanted to talk about, and how much he enjoyed it. He said he still tells his friends how great it was looking out over the falls, drinking a beer, and enjoying the scenery. We had a good time. He is from Scotland, so we had a lot of things to talk about. He has distinguished himself as the architect of a network of over 2,000 personal computers utilized to process data from the Large Hadron Collider (LHC). No need for a super computer with his solution.

We had a great lunch with everyone talking at once. One thing that has been bothering Nils is that, due to the enhanced security at CERN, he can no longer get in. Eric wanted to know if we would accept an invitation to go into the LHC to see the particles zip around. That was a special invite we were all eager to accept. He made a phone call, and found they were restarting the LHC today. The ring was sealed off, so that was out. We went instead to the big world visitor center, and enjoyed the displays.

Got back to the hotel about 3:30 to regroup, and get ready to depart tomorrow. Went to the petrol station to fill up the car with diesel. Andreas schooled us that in Switzerland it is called diesel, and the nozzle is green. In France it is called gasoil, and the nozzle is yellow.

After waiting in line, and finally getting a pump, my Visa card was declined. I had notified Visa that we were in Europe, and I had used it the day before to buy lunch. There was no attendant, so cash or help was not an option. Tried American Express, and it would not even communicate.

Went back to the hotel. got my Master Charge, and the same thing happened. Got a guy, that couldn't speak English, to see if I was putting the card in right, and I was.

I drove around looking for a petrol station with an attendant to no avail. Returned to the hotel, and Larue said Bank of America called. They said somebody in France was trying to use our card! Then they went into a long spiel about our card would be expiring next month, and on and on! You can imagine her response!

We went back to the petrol station, and the Visa card worked perfectly. Turns out that was the cause of our hotel reservation problem also. They rejected the charge for advance payment for the reservation, and we were never notified. So, the reservation didn't happen. Anyway, it all worked out. But, I did not get the good rate that I thought I had reserved under.

Had a nice quiet dinner at the hotel, and hung it up early, for the big day of travel.

Wednesday April 19

Had our croissants and stuff at the hotel, and headed to the airport at 9:30am, to allow plenty of time. Smooth sailing into the garage with no traffic to speak of. Just 10 or so round-a-bouts, and we nailed them all. The elevator in the parking garage was not working, and we had two flights of stairs, with our luggage. A guy with a young family helped us by carrying some stuff up.

It was confusing getting back through the right doors to Switzerland. We made it, and Andreas was there to see us off. Tried to talk him out of coming, as we would be going directly through security. But, he was there. We had time to visit before the wheelchair assistant showed up. Andreas went with us right up to security. He was thrilled we came to Switzerland. He got choked up when we said goodbye. I think we did him a lot of good, and he may want to get out, and on with his life. He said he may go to Denver to visit his brother in law, who lost his wife. He would really like to come see us. Hope he does.

Andreas is a cowboy at heart. He wears a Texas cowboy belt buckle, a leather vest, and likes country music. His son has a blue grass band and plays in the Geneva clubs.

Security was tight. The attendant took us down into an isolated room to wait for our flight. Then we went out onto the tarmac to a truck with a backend that goes up and down for servicing aircraft. Wheeled her on and lifted us up. Drove out to the plane on the tarmac, and backed up to the rear door of the plane, and we went straight in. A lot of equipment and people for a wheelchair assist. Nice two hour flight to Lisbon on Swiss (air) but no longer called Swissair that we used to fly on. They served a hot quiche that was outstanding.

I got looked at pretty good, and questioned at the customs window, after we deplaned in Lisbon. He went through Larue's passport carefully. Then he looked through mine examining each page, and got a serious look on his face. He motioned me to come up closer to

the window, and asked about the Australia stamp, "what was I doing there, where was I going, and what was I doing there".

We had no stamps in our passports showing us arriving in Europe, and that was a problem. Larue told him, "we are from Idaho with potatoes, cowboys, indians, and would he like to go with us?". He said he would if we paid his way, and waved us on.

Then more drama while waiting in the boarding area for our Portugese TAP flight to JFK. Security guards told everyone to leave the boarding area. We didn't know what to do. Then the gate person told us to stay put all by ourselves, and wait it out. Security lined everyone up in a single line in the concourse and began checking passports and boarding passes before letting them reenter the boarding area. With between 200-300 passengers it took a while.

Wheelchair assistance pays off. We get treated like royalty, and board first, with plenty of time to get settled. Also, you have no worry about getting where you need to be going, It is all done for you. The wheelchair assistant people work hard, as there is often a long distance, and up and down ramps. You have to have a lot of smaller bills to tip with, and it does add up. But it is worth it.

Was worried about our seat assignments. We lost our premium seats on the exit row because of the wheelchair assist. We were reassigned middle seats without our knowledge. I would go stark raving mad in those seats. I got a nice gate agent that could not do much, but talked to a supervisor. They still had two good seats available on the first row bulkhead, with lots of leg room. They were excellent, as we could stand up and move about. We were happy.

The flight was scheduled for 8 hours to JFK which is tolerable. Due to no winds aloft we made it in 7 hours. Had a decent meal, complimentary good Portugese red wine, and then a snack an hour before we landed. Not a bad flight at all.

The wheelchair assistant really had to work at JFK, as it was a long distance with long ramps to customs. Then off a long ways to baggage claim. We decided to get a taxi. Taxis are not allowed outside of baggage claim. We went forever to a rather sketchy area. Got in the taxi, and gave the driver our hotel name, about two miles

away. He asked if we knew the way. Gave him the address for his GPS, and we went about five miles on surface roads in a shabby area. Realized later that it might have been a test question to see if he could take the long way.

Got there and the hotel must have been under renovation, or should have been. The entrance to the hotel was in a back alley. The driver went down stairs, and got the desk clerk. The desk clerk said we had been moved to their sister hotel, the Sleep Inn, about one block away. We could see the sign. By then the taxi had departed. We could wait for the shuttle, that was at the airport, and would be a while. We walked. The desk clerk helped us get half way, but had to get back to the front desk.

I have never been a fan of Sleep Inn hotels. This one was a nice surprise. A very nice desk clerk, and the room was large by NYC standards. It was clean, roomy, and had two nice beds. We were pleasantly surprised. We ordered a pizza, and retired early.

Thursday April 19

Had a decent complimentary continental breakfast. The hotel shuttle could drop us off in front of Delta at terminal 4. We decided to go with them at 8:30am. Got checked in. The wheelchair assistant arrived, and away we went. It must have been a mile. Our gate was at the end of the concourse. The gal doing the pushing said she wears out a pair of shoes in six months. She had no idea how many miles she walks in a day. Larue advised her to get a pedometer. She had never thought of such a thing.

The Delta flight was packed. It was a long five hours to Salt Lake on a small plane with just one aisle, and not easy to move around. I was in an aisle seat in an emergency exit row, so had good leg room. I could stand up and not get in the way. Larue was behind me. Had a three hour layover before our Twin Falls flight departed. Kathleen met us at the airport, and were home by 6:30pm.

It was a great cruise and trip.

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The end