

BLANK

For some years, I had wanted to bike the Rhine from its humble origin in the Swiss mountains to where it flows as a gigantic waterway into the North Sea in the Netherlands. But Barbara was very hesitant to let me do this on my own, of course, for many good reasons.

Then I found this British group, "Bikeadventures," that specializes in organized and supported bike trips. One of them turned out to be the trip I had been thinking of. I signed up.

They take care of hotel reservations, have a rescue Van to transport your luggage, and provide two guides, one biking at the end of the group while the other drives the Van. There were 12 people who signed up and we would meet in Andermatt on Saturday 24 July and start the next day. I decided to be at the first hotel, in Hospental, three days before, so I could get a bit used to the higher elevation, and also to get over my jetlag.

All in all, I am glad I did the ride, it was a challenging but very satisfying bike ride.



Packing my bike



BOSTON

Me on a skateboard? No thank you. Barbara took the photo just for fun. I borrowed it from my dear son to transport the bike box...saved my back! I did, however, get lots of comments from younger people "Hi dude; good going..." and heads turned many times. That older guy with his heavy backpack and a skateboard at the airport. The Flight attendances and co-pilot had to ask, too, and gave their thumbs up when I told them that I brought it in case the plane was not fast enough...smiles. Great fun!

AMSTERDAM

HOEK van HOLLAND



Zurich, waiting for the train to Hospental



On the train from Zurich to Andermatt - the mountains are getting closer.



ZURICH

ANDERMATT

HOSPENTAL



After Thomas picked me up, my bike and skateboard companion, at the station in Andermatt, this was my cozy hotel for three days.

The first thing I wanted was a large beer on the terrasse.



Any bed will do when one has jetlag after sixteen hours of travel and a six-hour time difference. The room was cheap - \$75 a night, including breakfast - and the ceiling height was barely 6 feet high...! Bathroom and shower were at the end of the hallway. Well, I told Thomas, the young owner, that when I lay down to sleep, the low ceiling wouldn't bother me!

Hotel Burg in Hospental, a few miles from Andermatt.



Vacation Bike Trip Summer 2016

From the Source of the Rhine,
at Oberalppass, Switzerland
to where the Rhine ends in
the North Sea at
Hoek van Holland,
The Netherlands

A Bike Ride through
Switzerland, Liechtenstein
Austria, Germany
France and
The Netherlands

Challenging mountains, long flat
stretches, lots of sunshine, rain
and heavy head winds - but never
a boring day!



From 6720 feet...

Day one, two and three - preparation and “give it a try,” and it worked.



Got up early, too early for breakfast to be served. Had a good night sleep; the bed is better than the room. I had a key to the garage where my bike was still resting in its box. The box was taped with “Homeland Security” markings. Will be exciting to see what they did to my two-wheeled partner.

Opening the box, I found out that “they” had taken the bike out to inspect for unlawful things hidden inside. When putting the bike back again, it was easier just to throw out much of the soft padding just jam it in, adding a “sorry” note, and closing the box with tape from the sender. So much for me spending hours of packing and securing the bike before my travel.

Well, of course, there was damage. A spoke on the rear wheel was broken, so the wheel now had a slight “wobble.” The support at the bottom of the fork was missing and the pedals were just floating around, missing its protected foam, creating scratches on the bike’s frame. Well, I still had my bike, so I and put it all together to take my first ride.



Last glimpse of Andermatt



Biking from Hospental to Andermatt is a piece-of-cake, only a slight incline. Andermatt is a typical Swiss small town aimed at tourists in the summer and, especially, in the winter. The zig-zag road toward Oberalppass, up the mountain, starts in the center of town, with signs in a rotary to take a right. The climb starts without mercy, and I have to stop often to get my breath and to drink water. Soon I forget to enjoy the fabulous scenery, although I take a few pictures on my more frequent stops.

I think it was about halfway to the top that I had to give up. The descent was easier.

Lunch at the hotel, followed by taking small trips around the area. Feeling pretty good. An email home - “all is well....”



Take a right here...and good luck...!



Cobble stones everywhere



First Stage - Andermatt to Oberalppass -- going UP

An areal view of the challenge

The next day I am ready to attack the high road again. I fill-up the two bottles with water with a spoonful of honey, and off I go. The beginning isn't much easier as yesterday, but I pedal on and soon pass the place of my return yesterday. Optimism gets the upper hand. I stop for a minute. Two French bikers--maybe 25 years old--pass, going up like the road is flat, slowing down a bit they ask “ça va”?

“Oui, ça va. Merci, I am just slow.”

I made it so far...



Last step: the avalanche tunnel



Hurray! I made it



Within a minute, the weather changes



Zig-zagging along

After many bends in the road, a long avalanche tunnel indicates the top is near. It starts to drizzle; clouds are taking away the view. Excited I see the Lighthouse – hurry, only a half mile to go (still climbing).

At the top is the desired sign – “you made it.” At the restaurant Ustria Alpsu, I award myself with a big Curry Sausage and Fries (French, Freedom, Belgian or Swiss...?).

The sun shines again; it is chilly but who cares: I just made it. Going back downhill takes less efforts, but my knuckles are white from grambing on to the handle bar, trying not to lose control. My bike wants to go much faster, but I won't allow it. When I dare to look at my little computer, I see the speed is 76 (km = 47 miles). Back at the hotel a friend of Thomas had seen me on the road and arriving at the top, “good job,” he said. I am proud and ready for a beer and a long nap.



The reward, a “Sweinsbratwurst...”

Arrival of the group.

Friday, July 22. Had an early breakfast. The buffet consist of coffee, lots of good, homemade bread, several kinds of cut meats and cheeses, some fruit and small containers of yogurt. I said to Thomas that I wanted to bike a different route. He suggested to take the Gothardpass Road, just the opposite of my previous biking. It is heavily overcast, but he said that it would be sunny soon again.

I knew that the group would arrive later today, so I did not want to return too late. Off I went. Well this stretch starts with a much steeper incline. I pedaled for a few hours, but the clouds were getting thicker, and soon a light drizzle made it not too pleasant. Traffic is very heavy, too many cars and motorbikes racing toward the Gothard Tunnel to feel comfortable. More curves. Drizzle changed to buckets of rain, thunder and lightning in the distance and nowhere to hide. It's also much colder and the road is very slippery...time to return. A stop at a restaurant and a cup of hot chocolate gave me enough energy to return safely to my hotel. No beer on the terrace!

Rain changes to light drizzle again. Now that I am wet anyway, I decide to take a short ride to Andermatt to the COOP (supermarket) which gave me the chance to buy some bananas, chocolate and coconut water. Time for a hot shower and a nap!

Woke up around 5pm, to greet some of the first arrivals.



Got a wheel, now where is my bike?

The Van has arrived and bike boxes are unloaded, The place buzzes with activity with participants putting their bikes together and ready for the long ride.



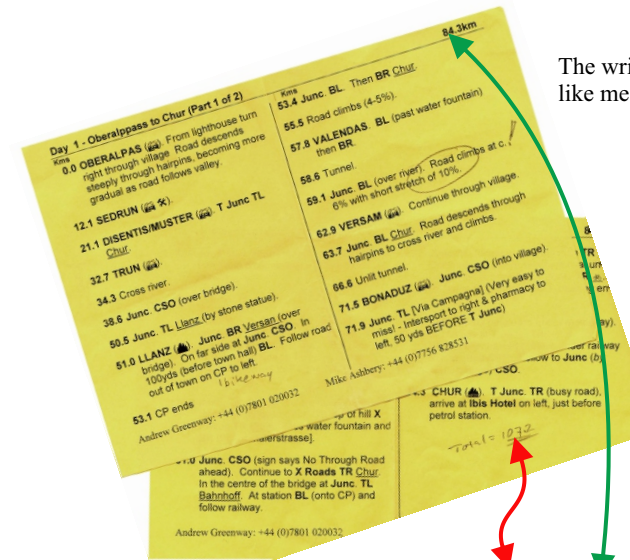
Mike and Andy check the GPS



Hope I have all the parts...



Controlled chaos



The written routes are for people like me who have no GPS device.



Made it to the top for the second time. Ready for some downhill fun...

Translation:
TL = Turn Left
BL = Bear Left
CSO = Cross Straight Over
CP = Cycle Path (Bike Way)
X = Intersection

Because of missed turns and road work that's not marked on our maps, the daily trips are usual longer than what the maps tell us. Numbers are in kilometers!

The twelve-person group consist of British, Australians, one American, me and the two British guides, Andy and Mike. Mike and Andy rotate "jobs" each day to either bike at the end of the group to make sure noone is lost, or to drive the Van.

The Van has our luggage, bike boxes, repair kits and pump, first aid and a large container with fresh water.



Note the "safe" railing!



Downhill...hit the brakes...!



Keep smiling...and braking



How many more curves to come?

Email to Barbara and Michel from the hotel in Lindau.

As I mentioned earlier on the phone, it was a tough day. In their brochure, they talk about following the Rhine. Well one thinks that's easy.. the water flows down hill...but, guess what, we are not ON the river, we just follow it! So the trip brings you from one mountain top to the next. Sometimes you struggle with 3 miles per hour trying to push your leg muscles to the limit, but then the rewards comes when you finally reach the top, and after your breath and pulse start sounding almost normal again. You look down into the abyss, and see ten, twenty, or more hairpin turns begging to be attacked.

Down you go, hands tightly on the handle bar, index fingers on the brakes, shifting between left and right, because too much pressure on either front or back, and you risk that your tire might explode... Your adrenaline pumps through your body. The next hairpin approaches fast.

But at the end of the descent you feel relieved and wishes it would have taken longer. My highest speed was 59 km an hour!!!

Anyway, today there was a little bit of everything. The not-so-easy part was coping with the heat, -- around 80F. The water in my two bottles tasted bitter after two hours, and for the next many miles there is nothing but towering granite walls on one side, and deep (very deep) valleys on the other side. So one lives with bad water and hopes that the stomach accepts it.

Ok, tomorrow we go about the same distance from here, Lindau, to Neuhausen, officially 130 km.

I am amazed not to have any problems with my seating part, since I use the ca. 4x8 Inc, unforgiving leather saddle so many hours a day.

Next hotel is: Hotel Rheinfall, Neuhausen.

Love you all,
Jan



Directions say: BL and immediately BR at Goat statue



The Rhine is a bit larger



I don't often offer myself the luxury to enjoy the beautiful views, but this one was too pretty to skip

On-the-Road-again.... Finally a flat stretch for some 10 miles. I don't see any of my partners, -- maybe they have passed me, maybe I took a wrong turn, who knows, maybe I am ahead of every one?



Our hotel Gasthof Stift, Lindau



Climbing on this very narrow and winding road was not my favorite. It was bloody hot, but needless to say, the view was magnificent.



The Rhine has taken on the look of a real river.



I forgot to put lots of my money in a Liechtenstein Bank! Actually, I did not bring enough for the bank to be interested. Anyway...now back to Switzerland.



Hotel Ibis in Chur

So, somewhere close to Chur, I managed to take a wrong turn; no road seemed to match the maps. I did not see the landmark hotel -Asking people, some would point me in one direction and others in a different one. The map told me to look for an Isuzu garage. I ended on an industrial street with loads of garages, but the right one was nowhere to be seen.

Then...a police cruiser came in my direction and I got their attention. "Gutten tag, Ich suche nach das IBIS hotel, aber bin verfahren..." The two young police officers asked where I came from. When told I had biked from Andermatt this morning, I knew to have scored a few points!

They smiled and felt that was easy: "Gehen Sie zurüch, dan links, zwei mal rechts...gerade aus...wieder links..." I must have looked tired (I was) and confused. They smiled and said " just follow us" Jokingly, I said sure if they would use the blue lights...?

I could not believe my eyes when they really did it. Now I am following the Swiss police in full pursuit...me in the middle of the road behind their cruiser! Quite a new experience! After fifteen minutes or so, they stopped and I could see the hotel. They smiled again and wished me safe travel, -- I forgot about being tired.



It's confusing. In the morning I am in Switzerland, at lunch time in Liechtenstein, then in Austria and complete the day trip in Germany...



What's new? Up at 6 am, shower, squeeze into my bike uniform, throw all other stuff into my back pack and carry it down to the lobby. The breakfast menu looks the same as yesterday, only the name of the hotel has changed. At this time of the day, I am not even vaguely hungry, but know that I need food, coffee and juice to keep me going for a couple of hours when paddling on my two-wheeled companion.

Everyone, including me, makes a large sandwich, wraps it in a stack of napkins, and squeezes it into my tiny saddle pack - waiting to be used around lunchtime.



Entering Malans, a pretty little town. No time for sightseeing; just another thoroughfare.



Alte Rheinbrücke before entering Liechtenstein, the trip has plenty of beautiful and interesting views...and gravel paths!



A pretty view a few miles before entering Bregenz, Austria

At one point, I caught up with Barry, the Australian, and we biked together to Friederichshafen. This is the town where the Zeppelin was born, including the Hindenburg that exploded in 1937 in New Jersey.

Mike and Andy were waiting with our Van at the large square in front of the Zeppelin Museum.

Unfortunately, there is never enough time to visit the many sites we have passed. I would liked to have visited the museum, but there is only time for a ten minute playtime. The cute sculpture is meant for kids like me. Things rotate and Andy had to give me a "ride." Great fun, but we fill our water bottles with lukewarm water from the big container in the Van, and off we go again.

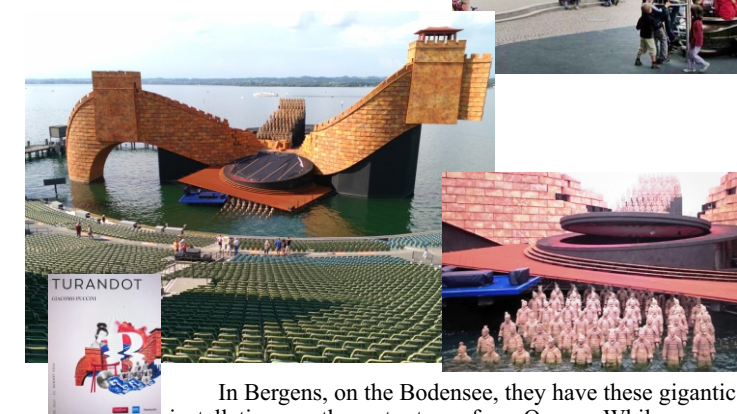


The kid in us all...!

Unfortunately, a visit to the museum has to wait, for another time.



Barry is a good biker, although he struggled in the beginning when we all were climbing the mountains and endless hills. Like all of us, he also made a wrong turn once and awhile, the instructions were not always as clear as we liked them to be.



In Bergens, on the Bodensee, they have these gigantic stage installations on the water to perform Operas. While we were there, it was Turandot. But alas...no time to see it. Just hurry-up, bike, bike, bike...(and maybe not enough money?)

From an email home:

Dinner was a Greek Pizza, not too bad. But today was not a great day. Another spoke broke, but I could not remove it while on the road because the whole tire has to come off, and this is too tough when one tries to get to the end station in the excruciating heat. Gaffer tape holds it together for now. My rear wheel wobbles and I hope it does not collapse.

I road about 119 km (76 miles), but lost at least an hour on today's ride. Tomorrow I hope to have my bike fixed.

It was all about biking, concentrating on the map, traffic, potholes and drinking enough water (not doing enough of the latter would get me in trouble with Barbara!!!) Getting to the next hotel, I am happy that I made it in a good time. A shower, change to some well wrinkled "civil" street cloth, find the group for a decent dinner and then to bed – can't sleep right away, so write an email to the family about today's excitement:

6:30 a.m., the alarm clock makes it's usual rooster sound, and my heavy hand reaches out to find that little button to kill it.

I turn over one more time to avoid the inevitable... getting up.

Opening my eyes...I see nothing but darkness... there should be daylight teasing my brain to wake up. But, no light... Oh boy I am blind, the last 3 days biking in an unforgiving Sun has destroyed my vision...

I rub my eyes and are able to remove the thick layer of lead that's covering my eyelids... I can see and I'm saved one more time!

A quick shower, putting on the padded bike shorts, the washed shirt which has dried overnight, and down to the breakfast room. Most of the bike group is already on their second cup of coffee. We, or rather "they", are eager to saddle their two-wheeled companion to, once more, pedal to the next destination. "See you later; have a safe ride..."

Back to the room to just throw everything in my backpack. Neatness was 4 days ago. I am ready to attack the road again; it's 7:00 a.m. Miles seem to pass slower than yesterday? I don't see much of the beautiful landscapes, because I have to keep my eyes on the road just in front of me, to avoid hitting a pothole, or missing that sign telling me to turn left or right.

The group has split up, and soon I am all by myself in front or far behind, I could bike 5 km or 30 km an hour, no one would know. They told us "it's not a race" but who wants to arrive last?

It is getting warmer by the hour and the water in my 2 bottles disappears fast. The route they have planned keeps us as much as possible away from the civilized world, meaning no super market or gas station to buy a Coke or juice. I wonder if the water in that, by now mighty Rhine, is drinkable?

Enfin, ces't ne pas possible (I just entered France). Just don't think about it.

About seven hours, a sore derriere, and some 140 km (87 miles) later, tens of steep ascents, and too few descents, the hotel is in sight. A cold shower and I am ready for a large cold BEER. Food is the last fuel for to day, I hope there is less lead glued on my eyelids in the morning. But that's another day.

Love you all Jan

PS: I have had more beer on this trip that I normally would have in a year. We all drank a few at night (never during the day!) because we are thirsty but also because it contains salt, which the body is screaming for. In the old days, I always had some strong licorice with me, to compensate for salt loss.



Pricey Swiss...



It's HOT after climbing in almost 80 degrees sunny weather. We constantly climb...I thought the Rhine was flowing down...?



BIKEADVENTURES to the RESCUE



A spoke is missing



Plus a flat tire

Our guides, Mike and Andy, lived up to the promise: great sense of humor and knowledgeable, always ready with a helping hand, or any other support, plenty of tools and parts in the Van. They fixed my bike in no time. "Take it easy, we will fix this for you..."

Mike and Andy in short:
Before leaving in the morning: "You're OK?"
Arriving at the hotel: "Great job, well done."



Enjoying a well-deserved cold beer with Barry.



Mike and Andy know how to deal with it



Almost done



Ready for the road, again: THANKS GUYS!!!



A short walk from our hotel, down steep narrow streets, I can hear the thunder of the Rheinfall long before I can see it. Then suddenly, around one more corner, there it is, totally breathtaking. It takes several minutes to inhale the view. The fall is approximately 900-feet wide and a staggering 215,000 gallons per second of whirling, foaming water runs over the edge, into calmer waters. It is here that the Rhine becomes a commercial waterway. It is awesome! I forget that I am suppose to be tired after a long bike trip.



Andy takes a picture of me, before we all hike back to find a good place for today's dinner. Note: I climbed out of my bike attire - nicely wrinkled, but who cares.



The view from the South side



Jim and me with a nice cold beer – cheers. We congratulate each other with a bike ride well done!



What's better than spaghetti and meatballs, carbs and protein



Barry and Mike, always smiling, especially after good food and beer



This is a good example of language confusion: The title in Hoch Deutsch would be: "Eichbaum Kleines Pilsner" (Eichbaum means Oak tree) The first line in Deutsch would be: "Du sagte doch immer, das kleine Dingen nicht rechnen"

They speak four official languages, Swiss German, French, Italian and Romansh. The latter has more that 6 different dialects, depending on what county one is in. This means that about ten miles down the road, they might have a tough time to understand each other, although "Hoch deutsch" is spoken everywhere.

Of course, Switzerland is called Helvetica (Latin) on their coins



Our hotel in Neuhausen, located next to the Rheinfall. The waterfall is considerably more impressive than the hotel, but hej, it's clean and convenient for tourist's view of that fast-flowing water.

We are in France again. The canal path is disrupted by port activities and a lot of industries. The gently winding path along a now much wider Rhine Canal built to accommodate shipping in and out of Mulhouse. On our right, a green forest. It's great to have some long stretches without seeing anyone, whether locals or some from our group; I can go my own speed.

Before a turn left, away from the river towards Kembs, I stop briefly at a memorial for the defeated French army and allies who together fought a hard battle here in November, 1944. An American-made artillery piece stands by and a World War II era tank is placed on the bank across the canal.

The Aussies are here already, waiting for Barry, who took an-other route..."He will be back..." Indeed, he came in sight 15 minutes later.



The WWII memorials on each side of the river



A river barge - now a restaurant...



Unfortunately, we came so late to the hotel in RUST, that noone was interested in visiting the EUROPE amusement park. We would not have done it anyway when we learned that it close at eight in the evening (!) and the entree fee was EURO 44.50 (almost \$50) ...per adult for a day!!!



The switch between beautiful fields of sun flowers...



We meet for a brief lunch brake. Do they all look a bit tired?



Even the French seem to like to decorate their paved gardens



Numerous locks make it possible for commercial and pleasure boats to navigate the river



...and seemingly endless gravel paths along the river.

The signage for bikers in Germany deserves high marks, as at almost every intersection one can find the next destination.



Back in Germany, this was our hotel in RUST



Auf wiedersehen and bonjour.
Crossing the Rhine from Germany to France one more time.



Meeting Barry, Ian and Jane at a casual lunch stop on the road. The Australians are good bikers. It's funny, on a 120 kilometer ride, I see very few of the others. Sometimes I pass a couple, and when I rest someone passes me. We all have our own pace, also because it turns out that all of us misread the directions a few times, adding mileage and time, but we always made it to the next hotel.



Jan, Lucy, Trish, Barry, Andy, Jim, Earnie, Barry, Barry, Jane, John, Helen, Edwin, Ian (Mike is taking the picture)
Early morning departure from our hotel Bildungshaus St. Bernard in Rastatt. This was the only time the whole group was together for a picture.

Email to Barbara and Michel from the hotel in Rastatt:

A funny thing happened this morning of the seventh day into our trip. First Andy's announcement that our route description was missing a part of the track, so we will bike in convoy for some kilometers. At breakfast, Barry suddenly felt he had a loose tooth...oh boy! But fortunately he had it and would try to find a dentist to have it fixed. By putting it into his back pocket, it slipped and fell on the floor...! Well, a tooth goes its own way. The next thing you see are four grown men, dressed in their not particularly charming biking outfits, on their knees, crawling under the tables searching for this important item. The other guests in the room, dressed more appropriately, many adults in suits and dresses, small girls in neat blouses and skirts, boys in shorts and shirts all watched in awe... Barry found it himself. It had rolled under another table, between a guest's feet...! All this would have been fine, but the funny thing is that this hotel is an old monastery...still very religious... waitresses dressed in all white. A couple of guests came over, to ask what happened, and told us they thought we were having a special morning prayer... The kids looked on in disbelief, too! Too bad we don't have pictures!
The groups' name BikeAdventure, is well chosen!

PS; I got Barry's permission to tell the story; he is a great sport, has a good sense of humor... and now is missing a tooth.



Hotel Bildungshaus St. Bernard, Rastatt



The ferries go back and forth all the time, so we never wait more than ten fifteen minutes for a ride. On this one, we were accompanied by our Van. A good time to chat, pump the tires, fill the water bottles and get information on the next stretch.

Barry takes a picture of me.



Danger ahead...



Email to Barbara and Michel:

As a boy, I was always fascinated by heavy equipment, especially the kinds they used for road repairs. I watched the guys using the jackhammer. It was always a big guy, with his stomach "muscles" hanging over his belt, hands firmly planted on the handles. His body would be shaking in tune with the vibrations of that heavy piece of equipment.

We jump some 65 years and now I became one of those. My belly is not popping out as much as this guy's I remember, but the similarity is close.

I am talking about my bike ride two days ago, from Speyer to Mainz. A less exciting ride along the famous Rhine. Many of the bike paths' surfaces were, for whatever reason, covered with gravel... not the finer version called stone dust, no, here was the real stuff... stones between 2 and 3 inches long! Thus my poor bike and me resembled the good, old work-man at work, shaking out of control. Holding my hands lightly on the handlebar to lessen the vibrations, would probably throw me off the bike. Oh well, it was only for 10 or 12 miles, then the broken asphalt returned, and my body and kidneys fell back in place again...

It was a hands-on experience.



Can't get that Willy Nelson song: On The Road Again..., out of my head.

From breathtaking views in the Swiss mountains to beautiful landscapes in the low hills of Germany. We are doing well, have passed the halfway mark - hurray only 400 miles to go....



An interesting Scarecrow...



Not all the roads were smoothly paved...



Jim and Barry, the British are coming..., on bumpy paths



We have seen the Rhine five times from two sides by crossing it by ferries. Here are Jim, Earnie and Barry relaxing for a few moments.



Make sure you stay to the left...



Mike on the Rhine...



One more stop to take pictures of a castle, of which there is one for every bend in the river.



"Not to boast, but there you see my castle. When we arrive, my butler will be waiting for all of us with tea and biscuits ..."

One has to stop to enjoy the spectacular views the Rhine offers. (The Rhine is on the right of me...)



DIE LORELEI - don't do the Rhine without seeing the famous rock. The campers are waiting to hear the beauty sing her alluring song...



The river is a gentle flowing waterway in the summertime, but the landscape can be dramatically different in the winter and spring. Note the terrasse on the right is about 12 feet above the river. Then look at the high water level and the built-up height of ice in past years.



"On the Rhine River, on the eastern shore, atop a steep rock, there once lived a nymph named Lorelei. She dressed in white and wore a wreath of stars in her hair. She was exquisite, but more than her physical beauty was the song she sang -- a song so alluring, no one could resist its pull. People said that anyone sailing close to that rock would lose his life, for her song was irresistible, and no sailors who tried to reach Lorelei ever returned."



Without getting together for food, beer and wine after a hard day of biking, we wouldn't be able to tell the tales of the day's long ride. Here are Ian, Barry, Jane and Barry enjoying it all before the sun sets and the bed calls.

An Email to Barbara and Michel:

I just arrived in Köln, the town where you and I met for the first time in 1982! Never been so dirty! On our start this morning, it rained buckets -- bad enough -- but after a few kilometers, it was like biking under a waterfall. This continued for all 112 km, all the way to Cologne. Not too funny, but we made it. Everyone else is in the same boat, we look like zombies, but we are still in good spirits. With the last water in our bottles, we, sort of clean the bikes -- making it lighter?

Now I just washed a half ton of dirt from my shoes, socks, biking pants, raincoat, shirt, underwear, helmet, gloves, and then myself under the shower, even my body is dirty from top to toe. I hope that most of my clothing will be dry by tomorrow morning, especial the only pair of shoes I have with me!!! I used the hair dryer on them for about twenty minutes; it seem to help a little. After dinner I will try it again.

Other than that... not a great adventure, I could live without a day like this. Our hotel is close to the Dom Church, so I might check that out in a couple of hours. Talk to you later.



Barry has arrived, too, and ready to enter our hotel.

Mike is, as usual, waiting for the last one to arrive, so he can store our bikes for the night. Even our always happy and smiling guide, does not look too happy.



We made it...now the best is yet to come...a nice, long, hot shower.

Gray is today's color, even the Dom doesn't look too interesting, although the tourists are still here.



The relentless rain continues all day while we continue a relatively short ride from Cologne to Duisberg, our last stop before entering the Netherlands. Only four more days to go.



Where is the fireplace when you need it? Two days biking in the rain, you're all wet and only a good sense of humor keeps you "warm" and going.



Hellen: "Have you seen John...? I am cold, too"

Mike took these pictures, and we all smiled - on his command. Hot chocolate and a piece of cake raises the energy and the calory count.

At least two times, meet the Van somewhere on the road. "Are we the last...or first...?" It's a great service, and that way they can keep track of all participants. Comments like: "We met Jane a couple of miles ago, she had a flat, but all is well," Where all they needed to know. Since the group is spread out, one never knows how we are doing. Today, I stayed mostly with Lucy and Trish; nice to have some company. Here we came first, but shortly after others came by to fill up their water bottles, and have a chat with Mike, who was driving the Van. "Byby, see you later."



On the road again...



The German bike paths were always well marked and in good condition - and sometimes, like here, a bit whimsical.

Hurray! Today we enter the last country on our trip - the Netherlands. It is still pretty cold with rain once in-awhile, but everyone's spirit is high; there is light at the end of the tunnel. We follow the Rhine pretty much on the many dikes next to the, now wide river. The landscape is now flat, but there is an increased headwind.



We left Germany behind and just arrived in the Netherlands



The very small bike ferry has brought us across the Rijn (the Dutch word for the river). The ferry's name "HEEN EN WEER" means "Back and Forth," a perfect title and made famous by the Dutch entertainer, Wim Sonnefeld in the early 1960s.

Finally, the weather is nice again. The sun beams its warm rays and I can bike in short-sleeved t-shirts again.



The road runner - still doing OK after all those miles



My first, and only, ice cream. The temperature was back to where I liked it, around 72 degree Fahrenheit, ca. 22 Celsius. The sugar keeps me going for another 15 minutes...



I arrived at Hotel Belvedere in Schoonhoven an hour or so before sunset. The usual beer and our exchange of "how was it..." made it all worth every mile.



Trish and Lucy made it, too, "Welkom in Nederland!"

Familiar turf and language...



Ready to attack the dikes, rain, hurricane head winds - it almost does not matter anymore - the beach is waiting...somewhere.

Sheep along the dikes. They can care less about me taking a picture as they have sen it all before.



The last rays of the sunset seen from my room.





Traffic jam! It was a funny scene. We are peddling along at a good speed, and suddenly the first cows appeared, I stop, she walks slowly and does not even see me - then one more - five more, and now there are a few hundred, walking from one pasture to the next. No way that I would interfere. Nature first. It might be my milk for breakfast tomorrow!



KINDERDIJK, that postcard perfect mill landscape near Rotterdam. Thousands of tourists – mostly Asians – pilgrimage to this place all year long. Millions of pictures are taken. Wish I got a penny for every shot...!

Trish takes the plunge...



The Flying Dutchman...before discovering his wounded toe.



Fun. We are all so excited by being so close to our final destination. It is a perfect warm temperature, that the water is calling like a Greek Siren. Andy is the first to jump in, calling on us to follow. Trish does not hesitate, and I follow. The water is warm and feels good on my sweaty body. Getting out I must have hit something sharp, and realize that a good chunk of my right toe has been cut. Andy put a bandage on the wound, and he navigates us, on our bikes, to the nearest hospital, some six miles away in Rotterdam. Entering the hospital the receptionist probably had never seen two guys each with a bike coming into the emergency room. Enfn, a friendly doctor cleaned my wound and bandaged my entire foot. No charge - of course... Fortunately I could still fit in my biking shoes.. We only lost an hour or so. THANKS ANDY!



Photo: Ans Otsen

The last few hundred feet: I was a bit skinnier than when I started, but a stronger and happier biker.

Some 1450 kilometers - 900 miles, on two narrow wheels, a small saddle, mountains, valleys, flat terrain, long stretches, rain, baking sun, heavy headwinds. Was it worth it? YES. My friends ask me if I would do it again? Oh yea! It was a wonderful experience.



From here...



...to here

Congratulations to all of us! Mike and Andy bought Champagne and two great Dutch layer cakes. (The seagulls almost got away with them!)

Thanks to BIKEADVENTURES for a well organized and supported: Rhine Source to the Sea.

The welcome committee. Our good friends, Ans, Menno, and Barbara, drove (by car - not on their bikes...) from Amsterdam to Hoek van Holland to greet the Rhine biker and his companions.

It made the whole trip worthwhile!!!
THANKS.



Time to go home - securing the bikes in the box again. Some have a long way to travel, especial the Australians and the American. The British are the closest, except for as I'll stay in the Netherlands for another couple of weeks.



MIKE and ANDY, our very professional guides and supporters - I will miss them with their knowledge and great sense of humor, but who knows, maybe one day our roads will cross again.



Our very last dinner together. Some of the twelve, I got to know while others remained bikers I met at rest stops and an occasional dinner. Hellen, John, Trish, Lucy, Jim, Barry(GB) and Barry (Austr.) were the ones I biked the most with. Being the oldest on this trip, I thank them for their warmth, support and great navigation skills, which saved me many a detour.

I thank Barbara, who supported me in taking this trip, and who nervously followed my journey via the phonetracker, emails and an occasional phone call. Also my "kids" Michel, Thurid and my ten year old grandson Alexander. He says that he already has signed up for the next trip!



Transporting the big bike box would have been impossible without my son's skateboard. Here I arrive at our friends' - Ans and Menno - place in Amsterdam.



The final-final. Home again, polishing my great companion and preparing it for the next trip.