

The Bernina Pass – May 17th

On May 17th, I woke up in St Moritz to heavy wet snow that was so thick that it blocked the TV satellite system.

At the 07:30 breakfast I found out that one of our group, a seasoned traveller, was down with tummy problems and that a couple of others were feeling a bit rough.

I had a delicious omelet that was cooked in a curious way. All the ingredients were blended together and the pan applied to the hot range. The chef kept turning things over such that I thought he had mistaken my order and was making some strange scrambled eggs. When almost all the moisture had gone, he took his spatula and sculpted the mass into a perfect omelet. There are obvious many different ways to achieve the same goal.

By 08:15 the town had disappeared when viewed from my fifth floor room. I had to let Bucky and Barnaby out onto the balcony to play in the snow.

Down in the lobby at 08:30 I watched the Insight group load their coach. An Indian lady was wearing a beautiful sari, the hem of which was dragging in the snow. When in Rome,

At 08:45 we boarded the coach for the very short drive to the railway station. We could have walked, but surfaces were too slippery and no sanding had been done.

The train is named the Bernina Express, which I took to be a local joke similar to the Newfie Bullet.

We were supposed to board at 09:30 but the heavy snow had delayed the train by 11 minutes.

What would have been a spectacular journey turned out to be a bit boring. The automated announcements, in English, German and Italian told us what we were missing. Notwithstanding, at one point I spotted a system of dragon's teeth anti-tank barriers spanning the valley.

The train was pulled by an electric engine using an overhead pantograph. With welded continuous ribbon track, the ride was as smooth as silk. From time to time we came close to the road that followed the train track and we could see six foot high snow banks cut by a snow blower.

We topped out in the Bernina Pass in an absolute white out. The photo on the back of the brochure was the only thing that told me what it looked like.

We descended into the Italian-speaking town of Poschiavo and walked about 500 metres to the Hotel Suisse. There we had a lunch that started with a huge salad that would have been sufficient. That was followed by some sort of mushroom flavoured spaetzle that was far too much. I pointedly took my knife and cut the portion in half, moving the deselected slice to one side. The waiter got the hint and did not ask questions. Dessert, which we really did not need, was a splendid apfel strudel washed down by Cafe Americano.

The decision had been made to scrap the original idea of taking the coach back to St Moritz. So, we had some time to kill before boarding the return train. We wandered around town in light rain. I got some nice shots of lilac and wisteria dripping water.

At 14:30 we boarded the train for a picture perfect return trip. Now I could see the track grades, and based on my experience on the Rocky Mountaineer, the incline seemed to be as much as 4% WITHOUT a rack and pinion drive. In New Zealand I had been on a steam train that had slithered on a grade of 1% in wet weather.

Halfway back I wandered to the hidden back of the coach and found a window that could be lowered. Risking life and limb, and freezing from the icy blast, I got some great photos.

We got into St Moritz about 16:00 and walked back to the hotel, using a series of three escalators to overcome quite a steep hill.

By 18:00 it was snowing again but I did not care as my photos “were in the can”.

In his welcoming toast, the General Manager of the Schweizerhof said that St Moritz gets nine months of winter and three months of bad weather. We toasted with white wine from the owner’s vineyard.

Our 19:00 dinner started with gorgonzola gnocchi and then a green salad. The main course was chicken breast, done to perfection.

Return to 2013 Photos http://www.ironrides.net/IronTrip/2013_Photos.htm