

RE-READING A SCHOOL DIARY

I find diaries surviving only from 1952, 1953 and 1954. None of them were maintained for the whole year. They begin well enough in January; but do not get much further except for odd entries here and there; and, it must be admitted, most entries are not exactly exciting.

However, from 28th August till the 8th September 1954 I did make daily entries, during a school trip to Switzerland. It was interesting reading these entries again, recalling what I could remember and, with the help of the Internet, comparing things now with what they were fifty-six years ago.

SATURDAY AUGUST 28

Went to Switzerland. Left Gatwick Airport at 8.30; arrived 11.00 at Basle. Had lunch there; went to Brienz where we were going to stay at the LINDENHOF as guests of Dr Benten. There was also a mixed party from Birmingham.

We flew in a Douglas Dakota; although the de Havilland Comet was in operation by this date, propeller driven aircraft were still the norm.

I find the Lindenhof is now a fine hotel since Haymo and Heidi Fotsch-Wermuth bought it in 1964. Ten years earlier it was just a fairly basic *pension*.

I noted that the school party from Birmingham was mixed. Ours was a boys' grammar school and, as far as I was concerned in those far off days, single-sex education was the norm.

SUNDAY AUGUST 29

Free morning. In afternoon went to the Aare Gorge; then up a funicular to the Reichenbach falls.

What I did in the morning, I do not remember. Almost certainly for some of the time I and others went to the lido on Lake Brienz (there was then no indoor swimming pool at the Lindenhof). As far as I recall we went there every day during our stay in Brienz.

The Aare Gorge near Meiringen is nearly 200 metres deep and hardly more than a metre wide at its narrowest point; going along the galleries and tunnels cut into the rock and over the wooden catwalks above the fast flowing torrent was quite impressive. I still have a set of ten photographs of the gorge which I bought; and I recall doing at least two paintings of the gorge in Art Club when I got back to school in September.

MONDAY AUGUST 30

Went up the Rothorn on the Rothorn-Bahn in the morning. Free afternoon. A party of girls from Bristol arrived.

The 7.5 km long Brienz Rothorn Bahn is an 800 mm gauge rack railway, which climbs 1678 metres from Brienz to the summit of the Rothorn mountain. Mr Henderson, the Head of Geography at our school and leader of

our party, told us that it was the only steam railway in Switzerland, the Swiss having electrified their railways. I am pleased to learn that, although the line now has a few diesels for additional trains and for light traffic periods, it still offers a full steam service to this day.

The arrival of a group from a girls' school in Bristol caused some mild excitement among us boys. They were under the charge of a formidable lady who seemed determined to keep her girls away from us at all costs. It was reported that she had referred to us as 'cockneys'; that did not go down well with grammar school boys from rural West Sussex. She soon became known as 'the Dragon.'

TUESDAY AUGUST 31

Free morning. In afternoon went to Interlaken by steamer and came back by same. Met a mixed Swiss party on board.

Interlaken is situated between Lake Brienz and Lake Thun, hence its name. It is one of the oldest tourist resorts in Switzerland, and it still remains one of the most popular. But, in truth, I recall little about it except one incident.

We had noticed in souvenir shops in Brienz smoking pipes with perforated lids (I believe someone did explain the purpose of these, but I forget what it was). I and some friends were browsing in one of the tourist shops in Interlaken, when an American couple came in; we saw the woman pick up two or three of these pipes before exclaiming to her husband: "Say, Elmer, look at these cute little pepper pots!" Stifling our laughter, we made a hasty retreat.

The steamer was one of the steam-driven paddle ships that went between Brienz and Interlaken. I believe there were three in operation at that time; but I did not record which one we used. I am pleased to learn that a paddle steamer, the PS Lötschberg, still runs on the lake.

It was interesting that I thought it necessary to note that the Swiss party of schoolchildren was mixed; quite possibly we seemed unusual to them in being all boys!

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 1

In morning went to Giessbach falls. Free afternoon. Went to yodelling club practice with the D's party in the evening.

The Giessbach brook tumbles in 14 stages, over a length of 500 metres down to Lake Brienz. Though it is listed as a tourist attraction, sadly I recall nothing about it.

However, the yodelling club practice still remains in my memory – not because of the songs or tunes, but because this all-male ensemble found it necessary to lubricate their vocal cords with generous quantities of beer between each song.

The D was, of course, the Dragon who brought along her party of school girls. By this time feelings were not as frosty. I assume she had discovered that we were not street-wise cockneys, but fairly harmless schoolboys from

rural Sussex.

THURSDAY SEPTEMBER 2

Left for Lauchbühl in morning. Stop at Wilderswil to go up Schynige Platte. Then arrived at Lauchbühl. Other two parties came.

The Wilderswil station is the terminus for the railway which climbs to the Schynige Platte, some 1970 metres above sea level, where we had spectacular views of the surrounding mountains.

We will have returned to Wilderswil and then gone by train to the town of Grindelwald in order to reach Lauchbühl. This was way up in the higher part of the Grindelwald valley at over 1520 metres above sea level. It is about an hour's walk from the town, though I am sure on arrival there was some form of transportation laid on.

There was no electricity at Lauchbühl and heating and lighting were provided by gas on the ground-floor. Dr Benten explained that having gas in bedrooms was far too dangerous, so candles or torches were the only form of lighting on the first floor and, for safety reasons, all naked lights had to be extinguished by 10.00 pm.

FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 3

Went by chairlift up the First. Walked to Faulhorn, Scheidegg Pass and back to Lauchbühl - 30 miles. Mr Coghlan arranged amusements for evening.

We walked to Grindelwald to take the Grindelwald-First chairlift which was then the longest in Europe, carrying passengers a distance of more than 5 kilometres. The lift is still there today, but now has comfortable six-passenger cabins.

On reaching the upper station at First, 2168 metres above sea level, we took the path to the Faulhorn, passing a small mountain lake called Bachsee on our way. The Faulhorn, at 2681 metres, offers some of the best views in this part of the Bernese Oberland.

From there we walked to Grosse Scheidegg, a high mountain pass connecting Grindelwald and Meiringen, and, taking the track towards Grindelwald, we returned to Lauchbühl. Thirty miles, however, was certainly an overestimation; a look at a map suggests 30 kilometres might be closer to the mark.

Mr Coghlan was a young sports master at our school. With three school parties in a mountain *pension* with no electricity, something had to be done to keep us occupied in the evening. Relations among the accompanying staffs had mellowed, and Mr Coghlan took the lead in organizing quizzes and other activities.

SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 4

Went to Wetterhorn Glacier, then to Grindelwald, and back by chairlift in afternoon. Mr Coghlan arranged a.f.e.

We hiked to the Wetterhorn Glacier where there was, and still is, an ice cave carved inside it. The cave seemed blue; this, I learnt, was because of the filtering of sunlight through the ice.

Then we went down to Grindelwald to buy souvenirs since we were to begin the return journey home the next day.

I'm not clear how we got back to Lauchbühl by chairlift as there was not a direct route there from Grindelwald. I guess we went to the first station on the Grindelwald-First chairlift and walked.

'A.f.e' is, of course, 'amusements for evening' arranged again by Mr Coghlan.

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 5

Left Lauchbühl . Stayed at Bern for 2 hours then went to Basle for the night.

This was our last day in Switzerland and the first stage of our return home. I remember the last morning at Lauchbühl as we were told at breakfast that there would be no coffee because the milk had gone off; however, Dr Benten informed us, there would be tea instead which, he understood, was an "estimable drink" in our own country. Nobody, it seems, had informed him that the British normally add milk to their tea!

Then began the first of our train journeys home: we traveled from Grindelwald to the Swiss capital, Bern; then after lunch we went on to Basle from where we were to take the train through Germany the next day. I regret I now remember nothing about these two cities.

MONDAY SEPTEMBER 6

Went by train through Germany to Hoek van Holland to catch boat at 1.15 am on Tuesday.

We traveled on the Germany Federal Railways (Deutsche Bundesbahn) from Basle, along the Rhine to the Hook of Holland. The one thing that sticks in my mind was passing Cologne. It seemed to me to be a large cathedral surrounded on all sides by ruin and destruction; I had never seen ruins on such a scale.

In 1945 the architect and urban planner Rudolf Schwarz called Cologne the "world's greatest heap of debris;" according to Wikipedia "[i]t took some time to rebuild the city." In fact the rebuilding was not completed until the 1990s. I am sure that when I passed by the city nine years after the war, some reconstruction had begun, but the ruin and devastation was still only too apparent.

TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 7

Arrived at Harwich before 7.00 am. Travelled to London, Horsham, and back home.

I remember nothing about the ferry crossing, mainly because I was asleep. We had small cabins with two bunks to each. But not going to bed till the early hours, I could have slept on almost anything. I recall being woken

about half an hour or so before arrival by the far too cheery voice of a sailor.

Then it was by train from Harwich to Liverpool Street, across London to Victoria, and then the final train journey to Horsham in Sussex, where my parents were there to pick me up.

WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 8

Back to School.

Need any more be said? I obviously thought not. There are no more entries in that diary until the 21st December.

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