



The charming village of Leukerbad with the impressive Gemmi Pass in the background

Musings on amusements in the Canon
**A charming weekend in the Swiss spa resort of Leukerbad
at the foot of the Gemmi Pass**

By Alexander Katz, ASH, BSI¹

Photographs by Daniel Laubacher and Marcus Geisser²

Almost 50 Sherlockians met together on Thursday evening, June 1st, for the start of our long weekend at the Le Bristol Hotel in Leukerbad, a spectacular 5 minutes' cable car ride away from the dramatic Gemmi Pass and the "melancholic Daubensee", both key locations in *The Final Problem*.

Sherlockians came from all over: Japan, France, Germany, the UK, Canada, the United States of America, and Switzerland. "For a charming week, we wandered up the valley of the Rhone, and then, branch[ed] off at Leuk...the dainty green of the spring below, the virgin white of the winter above" (FINA). What took Holmes & Watson almost a week to climb we did in 2-2.5 hours by train or by car, most of us coming from all over the world after having arrived at Geneva International Airport.

¹ Alexander Katz, ASH, ("Sarasate", BSI ("Sarasate")), after completion of his doctorate in Educational Leadership, has been working in the field of human resources. Alex is a lifelong Sherlockian (from the womb) and over the years has co-authored with Kate Karlson articles on Holmesian musical aspects which were published in *The Watsonian*, *The Serpentine Muse*, *The Baker Street Journal* and *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*. A trained pianist, he has performed at numerous Sherlockian gatherings. His recent achievement in the field of the Canon and music is his co-editorship with Karen Wilson of the Baker Street Irregulars Volume *Referring to My Notes – Music and the Sherlockian Canon*.

² Apart from the photographs depicting the Hotel Le Bristol on page 2 which you find on the website of the Hotel Le Bristol.



The 4-star Hotel Le Bristol with its 2000 m² (21500 square foot) private spa & wellness area

This latest Reichenbach Irregulars conference “Musings on the amusements in the Canon” invited us to enjoy a combination of exploring Sherlockian sights that only few of us ever visited, the “melancholic Daubensee” and the Gemmi Pass. Whilst examining and musing on the amusements in the Canon through a series of conference papers and amusing performances delivered by high-caliber speakers from around the globe. Along with beautiful scenic views of the Swiss Alps, the Hotel Le Bristol has incredible thermal spas, and everyone was looking forward to a relaxing weekend!³

We were welcomed that evening with an opening reception and aperitifs, where there was time to catch up with those we haven’t seen since the pandemic and meet new Sherlockian friends. Organizers Marcus Geisser, BSI (“Rosenlauri”) & Michael Meer, BSI, (“The Englisher Hof”) welcomed us, as well as members of the hotel staff. Afterward, we enjoyed a delightful three-course dinner.

Following dinner, Michael Meer, accompanied by Helen Dorey, talked to us about the local area, specifically the Gemmi Pass, where we would be spending the day on Saturday. The Gemmi Pass is quite beautiful, but also dangerous...apparently there is still snow on the ground; so much that is closed for hiking! Additionally, Michael talked to us about the Daubensee and the surrounding area, invoking Conan Doyle as well as other authors like Guy de Maupassant and Alexandre Dumas to help set the mood for our upcoming weekend. All of them were inspired by both the beauty as well as the horror that this alpine landscape offers to the imagination of authors. Helen Dorey, BSI, (“Helen Stonor”) provided readings from Conan Doyle’s impressions from his visit to this part of Switzerland in August 1893 to help illustrate the area where we were staying.

³ This was our home for our long weekend: [Le Bristol****Hotel & SPA | Le Bristol Wellness Hotel Leukerbad](#), one of the few hotels in Leukerbad offering its own private spa and pool area.

The next morning, there was time for a swim the baths before our morning presentations began. Marcus Geisser introduced David Richards, BSI (“Colonel Warbuton’s Madness”), who served as a gracious and benevolent moderator for the day’s presentations. Each speaker received an eloquent introduction that set a great tone for their presentations.

Marcus opened the conference with his presentation entitled “Amusements in the Blood?”. He spoke to us about the different amusements that Sherlock Holmes enjoyed, including music and the violin, boxing, of course, but also cigar smoking, music of the Middle Age or rambling and walking, , in short, some of those strangest forms that art in the blood can take. Daniel Laubacher, an American Swiss Sherlockian who lives in the Swiss capital of Berne, provided some video and audio footage to help illustrate Sherlock’s amusements.

Julie McKuras, BSI (“The Duchess of Devonshire”), then presented on “The Turkish Baths”. A very fitting presentation considering our hotel had wonderful baths! She delighted us in the history of the baths, as well as their medicinal effects (those who had enjoyed the baths prior to the morning presentations agreed that they were very positive), as well as which baths Holmes & Watson might have visited in London.

Following those presentations, a wonderful one-course lunch was served, and we all had the opportunity to mingle and catch up over a wonderful meal!

The afternoon presentations began with Mia Lagargard, BSI (“The Dynamics of an Asteroid”), who introduced her presentation “Watson by the Seaside” with a song! We all joined in a rendition of “I Do Love to be Beside the Seaside”. Mia then presented on the seaside and enlightened us on the fashion that men and women would wear. Mia presented definitive reasoning for why Watson would have gone to Margate Beach.

Marsha Pollak, BSI (“A Small But Select Library”) introduced her presentation with a quote, “I tried to interest myself in a yellowback book” (BOSC), and posed two questions: What is a yellowback book, and, equally as important, what would Watson have been reading? Marsha took us through yellowback books’ history and finished with the idea that Watson would fancy himself detective novels to read (fitting for his roommate and friend).

Guy Marriott, BSI (“The Grand Hotel du Louvre”), provided what could be the other side of the coin for Marcus’ earlier presentation. Guy presented on amusements that Holmes & Watson could have enjoyed that were not mentioned in the Canon! Those amusements included excursions, such as the London Zoo or Tussauds Wax Museum, both of which were located within walking distance of Baker Street.

Catherine Cooke, BSI (“The Book of Life”), gave a “fiery” presentation on the concert halls of the day. I say she gave a “fiery” presentation, because a running theme throughout her presentation was the numerous fires that occurred in these concert halls, and many of them burned down!

Peggy MacFarlane, BSI (“Violet Westbury”), assisted by French Sherlockian Sonia Yazmadjian gave the final presentation of the day, “Circus Sherlockiana”. Peggy and Sonia delighted us with a history of the British circus, explaining how Eugenia Ronder’s story fit in more closely with that of a circus memoir than a Sherlockian story. To augment the circus aspect, Peggy performed while presenting to us! She dazzled us with her use of Devils Sticks, put together a hula hoop and put on an acrobatic show, and even disguised herself in clown make up!

The day’s presentations were finished, and there was an opportunity for guests to enjoy the baths again, as well as venture into the town of Leukerbad. Many of the attendees wasted no time in enjoying the baths and the pool, as the weather was picturesque. Dinner that evening would be on everyone’s own, providing more time to explore the area, as well as socialize and enjoy the spectacular views in this area! Later that night, several guests gathered in the hotel lobby to enjoy some more chatting and stories, as well as a night cap or two before heading to bed.

The following morning, guests could again enjoy time in the baths and a nice breakfast at the hotel, before we made our way to the Gemmi Pass. “We made our way over the Gemmi Pass, still deep in snow...we passed over the Gemmi and walked along border of the melancholy Daubensee” (FINA). Getting to the Gemmi Pass provided the option of either a bus ride, or a twenty-minute walk, to the Gemmi Pass Station. However, the Gemmi Pass bus station dropped us off at the bottom of a very steep hill. It was preparing us for the ride we were preparing to take! Climbing a steep hill brought us to our cable car which rode us up 1400 meters in 5 minutes! At its peak, we were 2350 meters (7710 feet) up!

Arriving at the Gemmi Pass, we could see that indeed there was still snow covering much of the area, but there was still an opportunity for those who wanted to hike and explore to do so...which many of the guests did! Others chose to take in the beautiful views by the restaurant area which offered full panoramic views of where we were, as well as impeccable views of the Swiss Alps.⁴



“the melancholic Daubensee”, still partly covered in snow



Amazing views from the top of the Gemmi Pass overlooking Leukerbad and the Valais Alps

⁴ The Gemmi Lodge is a fantastic spot to enjoy delicious Swiss food and spectacular alpine scenery next to the “melancholic Daubensee”: www.gemmi.ch. Our host Wolfgang Loretan deserves the title of the Peter Steiler of the Valais Alps!

Whether sitting inside or outside, we all enjoyed each other's company, as well as a drink or two. Getting to the Gemmi Pass certainly earned itself a drink as a reward!

Marcus asked us to stand on the terrace for two attendees who had been attended previous outings but had passed on. David Richards, BSI ("Colonel Warbuton's Madness") remembered Brian Stone, whom he had met during his first Reichenbach Irregulars outing and whose wife Johanna, an author of highly successful Sherlock Holmes pastiches, had joined us dressed for the day in wonderful Victorian attire. Marcus remembered Jon Lellenberg, BSI ("Rodger Prescott") who had not only attended all the prior outings and was instrumental in organizing and encouraging Marcus and Michael to go ahead with some of their alpine Sherlockian excursions. A somber but important moment.

We were then treated to a delicious lunch at the restaurant, consisting of "Gerstensuppe", a barley soup, Walliser Cordon Bleu, country fries, and Gemüse. For dessert, there was a "Dessert Variationen"; looking at the menu, we thought that would be a dessert tray with assorted treats from which to choose. What a surprise it was when each of us received our own tray which had chocolate mousse, a tart, ice cream, and a slice of tiramisu! To say we were full was an understatement.

Marcus reminded us that although we were invited to take in the view as long as we liked, the last cable car would depart at 5:30PM that afternoon, and we should not miss it! Michael provided a very creative solution for what one would need to do to return if missing the last cable car: Fake a heart attack and send for the medics via helicopter! Needless to say, everyone returned prior to the last departure. The five-minute cable car ride allowed us to enjoy great scenery, without the risks of hiking up and down.

Once back at our beautiful hotel, many guests returned to the spas and the baths for the afternoon or relaxed after our daunting journey to and from the Gemmi Pass. We all were excited for our evening entertainment.



The hugely talented violinist Luis Alfredo Montes Meneses from Venezuela performing Paganini, Mendelssohn and Telemann

That evening, we were treated to a wonderful violin concert by Luis Alfredo Montes Meneses, a violinist from Venezuela! Although Luis told us he was not a Sherlockian, and had never read Sherlock Holmes, he did prepare by reading Guy Warrack's *Sherlock Holmes and Music* prior to his performance, so we all told him he is now a Sherlockian!

Michael Meer introduced Luis to us by recounting how difficult it was to find a violinist who was willing to perform Paganini in public. Not only did he need to find someone who had played and practiced Paganini, but someone who felt comfortable performing it in a public setting! As Luis pointed out, we were his Watsons, indeed!

Luis was a charming young man who performed four solo pieces for us, each of which was outstanding. He performed two Telemann pieces, and two Paganini caprices. As an encore of sorts, Luis performed one of Mendelssohn's "Song Without Words" to a piano accompaniment. He received a thunderous applause at the end, which was surely earned. Everyone greatly enjoyed his performance and was already looking forward to his return next time! Luis was kind enough to take questions from us as well as talk to us after his performance. He also stayed for dinner, which was another excellent three-course meal.

After dinner, there was more time for sitting by the hotel bar and catching up or unwinding with some drinks before heading to bed. The conference was entering its final night, so focus was turning to packing and preparing to leave after it closed the following day.

The next morning Marina Stajic, PhD, BSI ("Curare") presented on a line that does not appear in the Canon: "Quick Watson, the Needle". Marina explained how strongly that phrase was denounced by prominent Sherlockians in the

Baker Street Journal. She also offered some insight as to how that phrase might have come about: An operetta entitled “The Red Mill” in which two conmen appear as Sherlock Holmes and sing a song, it is possible that line might have been adlibbed as it does not appear in the original libretto. More likely though, it was reference to a baseball game!

Michael Meer closed out the conference presentations with a presentation entitled “Among the Führer's Favorite Flicks: Sherlock Holmes on the Berghof”, where he described Hitler and the Nazi’s fascination with Holmes. Along with using Holmes as propaganda, Hitler also personally enjoyed Sherlock Holmes and reportedly asked for copies of *Der Hund von Baskerville* to be sent to him for private viewings. Although controversial, it is unsurprising that if Churchill enjoyed Sherlock Holmes, Hitler would as well.

Marcus and Michael then closed out the conference by providing the speakers with a beautiful box of Sherlockian chocolate treats from the Frutal bakery from Meiringen.⁵ The box looked so nice that it was difficult to want to open it!

The next conference has not yet been set, but by the warm applause and thanks that Marcus and Michael received for organizing this conference everyone is already looking forward to another one! There is a rumor that it might take place in 2025 or 2026 in Lausanne to commemorate the other significant Sherlock Holmes adventure with some significant Swiss connections, *The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax*, elementary!

The conference officially ended with a final one-course lunch, and then the attendees said their goodbyes and started their journeys elsewhere. The conference was just as Marcus and Michael had hoped: a wonderfully enjoyable and relaxing long weekend, filled with excellent talks and even better friends, new and old.

Many thanks to Marcus and Michael for organizing such a fantastic event for us all, and we are surely looking forward to the next one!

⁵ See for yourself! [FRUTAL Versandbäckerei](#).