



Reichenbach and Beyond—*The Final Problem* revisited

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*Accompanied with photographs taken by Hiroko Nakashima*²

Not everything went according to script and it was almost as if Moriarty and his minions somehow controlled the weather. But three years after their splendid gathering “Alpine Adventures - A. Conan Doyle and Switzerland” in Davos, Switzerland, The Reichenbach Irregulars put together another stellar program on Sherlock Holmes and his Alpine adventures.

This time the gathering was in the heart of the Bernese Oberland, not in the town of Meiringen, but above it in Hasliberg-Reuti. The conference consisted

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of two parts. The first part focused on what happened after the inevitable showdown between Holmes and Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls, when Holmes “*took to (his) heels, did ten miles over the mountains in the darkness.*” The second part of the conference dealt with Doyle’s literary exploits after he had finished Holmes in *The Final Problem* in 1893 and the circumstances that made Doyle return Holmes in 1903.



Thursday - the atmospheric welcome panorama at Hasliberg Reuti.

The approximately 70 participants at “Reichenbach and Beyond – *The Final Problem Revisited*” came from all over the world, including Japan, Canada, England, Spain, Germany, France, Italy, the United States, and of course, Switzerland. The event began on the afternoon of Thursday, 31 August, 2017 at the Das Panorama Hotel, called that because of the spectacular view of the surrounding mountains and the Reichenbach Falls.

The participants, however saw—nothing! Just mist and fog, more like a pea souper in London. The weather would force plans to be altered over the four days, but, Marcus Geisser and Michael Meer, organizers extraordinaire, rose to the occasion.

That first afternoon Marcus and Michael greeted us, and we trooped off via two coaches to Meiringen.

The first stop for half the group was the Sherlock Holmes Museum located in the basement of the English Church. The exhibits culminated in the recreation of the 221B sitting room. Many pictures were taken inside the museum as well as with the Sherlock Holmes statue outside.

The other half of the group started out at the Museum der Landschaft Hasli, which featured historical and cultural exhibits from Meiringen as it would have looked to Holmes and Watson in 1891. Fires in 1879 and 1891 burned most of the town, ending the practice of building wooden houses there.

After a welcome from many dignitaries, the combined group made its way to the Englischer Hof, currently known as the Parkhotel du Sauvage, for an aperitif and then mingled until it was time to head back up to Das Panorama and dinner.

There, hotel owner Panos Perreten greeted everyone. Plus, there was a surprise welcome from the Hound, Odin, a wonderful Anantolian Shepard dog, brought by Katharina Anthony Kittelsen, and dressed in deerstalker and cape.

After dinner, Michael Meer showed his film *The Many Falls into the Reichenbach Falls*. This compilation of nine film clips began with the 1923 Stoll film, *The Final Problem*, with Eille Norwood, and ended with the 2016 *Sherlock* episode, *The Abominable Bride*. Interestingly, the 1985 Jeremy Brett *Final Problem* was the only one filmed at the true Reichenbach Falls.

The next morning, Friday, September 1, the conference began with a series of papers proposing possible routes that Holmes might have taken after Moriarty's plummet into the Reichenbach Falls. What mountain pass did he take? How did he manage? Who helped him?



Eva Iggländ disclosing the mountain guide who assisted Sherlock Holmes to cross the alps: Melchior Anderegg.

Eva Igglund asked: How did Holmes get across the Alps? How could he have crossed without a guide? Her answer: He had a guide—Melchior Anderegg, the king of mountain guides who took English tourists to glaciers. He would have been the right person to take Holmes, and he would have been available in early May because the passes were still snowbound. According to Eva, they would have taken the Gemmi Pass.

And, if Melchior did take Holmes, could it have been Moriarty's gang who took revenge on the people of Meiringen for housing Holmes by setting that devastating fire to the town in 1891?

Outside the Sherlock Holmes Museum, there is a second statue, one of Melchior with his tall, thin English client, Leslie Stephen -- or, could it actually be Holmes?

Guy Marriott offered his observations on the various mountain passes that Holmes might have taken, and what equipment would have been needed to go through them. According to Guy's copy of Baedeker's *Switzerland*, on a walking holiday one should have a small bag with items such as a pocket lantern and rope as well as an alpenstock. Holmes had none of these, but it is possible he could have met Melchior at an earlier time and hired him as his guide, with Melchior providing the needed supplies.



Guy Marriott's choice for the pass Holmes took reach Florence: Susten Pass.

Although Guy acknowledged Eva and Melchior, he came to a different conclusion as to how Holmes got away. His preferred route? Through the Susten Pass, which has a village, Gadmen, about eight miles from the Falls and then on to Wassen where there was a railway train.



Brian Stone (assisted by his wife Johanna) arguing for his route:
Rosenlauri and Grosse Scheidegg.

Brian Stone also looked at the probabilities and realities of how Holmes left the Falls and got to Florence. What was Holmes thinking up on the ledge? He made a decision that he had to flee. Brian posits Holmes went up to Zwirgi and slept in a storage hut. The next morning he continued walking further up to Rosenlauri to the Grosse Scheidegg pass, descending to Grindelwald where he could take the train to Interlaken and send a coded message to Mycroft from the Anglican church.

Enrico Solito talked about why Florence was the goal, mentioning that it was the center of the English community and was once visited by Queen Victoria. Enrico, from Uno Studio in Holmes-The Sherlock Holmes Society of Italy, was one of the organizers of the Italian conference in Florence one week later, which many Swiss conference participants also attended



Enrico Solito's tour de force about the Florentine Sherlock.

As Marcus said, Friday was a “*very atmospheric day*,” but neither the fog nor the on-and-off rain stopped the excursion to Rosenlauri. Everyone boarded

the coach, and it was standing room only. On this ride and others, Nicholas Regamey provided everyone with Swiss coach tickets as a commemorative souvenir.



Lunch at Rosenlauer.

As the coach made its way up the mountain along the narrow road, Marcus (whose BSI investiture is “Rosenlauer”) gave some history and lore of the *Belle Epoque*-era Hotel Rosenlauer and speculated why Peter Steiler might have suggested Holmes and Watson go there.

After a lovely lunch at the hotel and a bit of a walk around the grounds, the group headed back. Although the original plan was to stop on the return trip at the Restaurant Zwirgi to allow those who wanted to disembark and visit the Reichenbach Falls, the weather still refused to cooperate. It was too rainy and slippery to take a chance walking down the paths, and nobody wanted any other casualties should someone slip and go over the falls!

However, Marcus and Michael were nothing if not flexible and nimble in adjusting the itinerary. Instead, the coach stopped at the lower station of the Reichenbach Funicular, and those who wanted to ascend to the viewing platform could do so.



It is indeed a fearful place.

Many braved the elements and took the cog to the upper viewing station. Upon arrival, a veritable gale drenched everyone, almost knocking people over. Those who had been here before all agreed they had never seen so much water going over the falls. It was exhilarating and exciting. An even braver few started to ascend the mountain for a higher view, though no one walked the entire way to Zwirgi.

After descending back to the lower station of the funicular, all boarded the coach, which made its way back to the Das Panorama. After a short rest and time to dry off, the group was treated to a paper by Marina Stajic about the mystery of Adelheid Halm.



Marina Stajic revealing the mystery of the Adelheid Halm.

This was certainly a mystery as no one knew who Adelheid Hahn was. Marina explained that she was a young woman who had been hired by Holmes's parents, but when Adelheid and Sherlock became close, his mother sent her away, never disclosing that to Sherlock. Sherlock felt betrayed, and thus began his behavior of never trusting women.

Without going into too much detail, let us say a child was born—and the daughter of Sherlock Holmes and Adelheid was Heidi. Ten years after the publication of the book, *Heidi*, by Johanna Spyri, Holmes and Watson went to the continent in *The Final Problem*. But why to Switzerland? Because Holmes wanted to try and meet his daughter! Perhaps, Marina said, Heidi was his guide to Florence.

As an aside, Enrico joked that Holmes went to Florence because he has a son there—Pinochio!

After another four-course dinner at Das Panorama, Michael Meer provided the most hilarious moment of the weekend. Michael explained that he had originally read the canon in German. Then he re-read the *Final Problem* and *Empty House* in English for the first time, and when he came to the sentence “I found myself in Florence,” he had one pressing question: “Who the heck was Florence?”

The room dissolved in laughter.

Michael then went on to say that she was Florence Foster Jenkins, an American socialite singer who wanted to study music in Paris. She contracted syphilis from her husband and terminated that relationship. Michael's thesis is that she was embarrassed by her illness and fled to Europe and met Sherlock Holmes. This premise is a work in progress, and a lot still remains in the dark.

Saturday morning, September 2nd, brought the highly anticipated classic coach tour of three of the mountain passes that Holmes might have taken: the Susten, Furka and Grimsel. However, this was not to be as an early snow in these high Alpine passes made it too dangerous to attempt. Another disappointment, and thoughts turned again to the possibility of Moriarty somehow playing a hand in this.

Once again though, organizers Marcus and Michael stepped up and substituted a journey in the postal coaches along the Brienzersee, through the town of Interlaken and along the lake of Thun (the Thunersee) to visit the Schloss Hünegg. This castle is a museum of interior furnishings from the second half of the 19th century, the perfect time period for a Holmesian outing. Set in a wooded park, it was the home of Baron Albert von Parpart and his wife Adelheid. The interior is unchanged since 1900 and includes gorgeous furnishings and architectural details. After touring the castle, the group had lunch at a lakeside restaurant in Thun.

Here are a few notes, provided by Guy Marriott, on our vintage Swiss postal coaches: Both are privately owned, by their drivers. The one with the bonnet, or hood, over its extended front engine was built in 1951 by the famous Swiss lorry manufacturer, Saurer. The second coach with a more conventional look was made in 1957 by FBW, another Swiss lorry manufacturer. The companies merged in the 1980s, but no longer manufacture coaches.



Trustworthy Swiss companions from 1951 and 1957.

The coaches are right-hand drive so that the driver can more easily see the edge of a usually narrow road, some with steep cliff drop-offs.

The coach horn is a real delight, and only postal coaches are allowed to use it. If drivers hear a three-tone horn, from the William Tell overture, (C sharp, E and A in the key of A major), they need to pull over and stop as the postal coach has priority over all traffic.

As it was, pedestrians in Interlaken stopped to take pictures of the two old-time coaches passing through as they were not a common sight. The coaches

also came to a halt in the town of Brienz as shepherds were bringing their cows and goats through the streets, with bells cheerfully ringing.

After a traditional Raclette dinner on Saturday evening featuring a special Swiss cheese melted and served with small potatoes and pickles at Das Panorama, there was a lively debate as to whether the Holmes who returned to Baker Street in 1894 was different from the one who left in 1891.

This harkens back to the story Doyle told about his worst critic, a Cornish fisherman, who told him, “*Well sir, Sherlock Holmes may not have killed himself falling over that cliff. But he did injure himself something terrible. He’s never been the same since!*”



Debating the Cornish fisherman’s thesis.

Michael Meer moderated the panel made up of Julie McKuras and Mitch Higurashi, who thought there was a decline in Holmes’s skills, and Peggy Perdue and David Bentata who did not. Arguments flew back and forth, ranging from Mitch’s thought that maybe someone was substituting for Holmes, a shadow warrior, to Peggy’s assertion that Doyle made up the story of the Cornish fisherman and it was just a joke. Julie cited mistakes and things wrong in many of the later stories whereas David stated the stories were as good afterward as before. No definite conclusion was reached here, and there was much fodder for future discussions.



Sunday morning - a panorama, at last!

Sunday morning, September 3rd, the lectures continued. The Great Hiatus, Doyle's "post Sherlock Holmes" literary exploits and the journey from *The Final Problem* to *The Final Return* were topics of the last four papers.

Catherine Cooke discussed Holmes' travels in Tibet as Sigerson, the Norwegian explorer. Catherine proposed that Conan Doyle was inspired by a Swedish explorer named Sven Hedin who had made several attempted trips to Tibet, though he was turned back each time.



Catherine Cooke following in the footsteps of Swen Hedin.

Cliff Goldfarb put forward that Sherlock Holmes was dead after the struggle with Moriarty at the falls, and Arthur Conan Doyle needed a replacement. Doyle was fascinated by the Napoleonic Wars and Napoleon, and he came

up with Brigadier Gerard. Doyle wrote 18 short stories featuring Gerard, the first of which was published in the Strand Magazine in September 1894.



Cliff Goldfarb introducing Brigadier Etienne Gerard.

Though these stories were more diverse geographically than those in the Canon, still none took place in Switzerland. Cliff fixed that omission by mixing his words with Doyle's and wrote a wonderful story that he told to the group.



Jon Lellenberg presenting Doyle's best or worst thing he ever wrote.

Jon Lellenberg presented the work that he and Dan Stashower completed on *The Stark Munro Letters*. According to Doyle, that volume was "*the best thing or the worst thing I ever wrote.*" Actually, Jon stated that it couldn't have been Doyle's worst book, giving that honor to the *Mystery of Cloomber*, and it couldn't have been his best work since there were still more Sherlock Holmes stories to come.

However, it was a deeply autobiographical book, based on his early years as a young doctor. Jon compared and contrasted it to Doyle's first novel, *The Narrative of John Smith*, written ten years earlier after initially being lost in the mail and rewritten from memory.



Marcus Geisser depicting the journey from *The Final Problem* to *The Final Return*.

Marcus Geisser closed the conference with his talk on how Doyle's thoughts on the demise of Sherlock Holmes were much better documented than his thoughts on the return of Sherlock Holmes. Money was Doyle's primary motivation to bring Holmes back, and Marcus walked us through his research that showed that. Marcus highlighted the role Norman Hapgood of *Collier's Weekly* played to convince Doyle to bring Holmes back, his past encounters with Doyle and his connections with William Gillette.

In summary, everything may not have gone strictly according to plan, but everyone appeared to have had a wonderful time at the "Reichenbach and Beyond: *The Final Problem* Revisited" conference at Hasliberg-Reuti. Credit for that goes in large part to both the preparations of Marcus Geisser and Michael Meer as well as their ability to quickly change and update those plans when necessary. Moriarty could not ruin the weekend filled with knowledgeable speakers and fun outings

All of which makes the next Reichenbach Irregulars conference in 2019 marking the celebration of their 30th anniversary something to eagerly anticipate.

Some final impressions of a most memorable weekend in alpine heights.






