

Swital-lock 2017

*On Sherlock Holmes's footsteps between Meiringen and Florence
Itinerary by Enrico Solito's paper...with an added twist.*

DAY 1 - SUNDAY, THE 3rd OF OCTOBER

The lectures are done, the wonderful meeting - entertaining and scholarly interesting - organized by the Reichenbach Irregulars is over, but more fun has yet to come.

Luckily, the sun decided to show up and the day is very promising. We are 12, ready to follow the path traced by Enrico Solito, the route that - by his researches - Sherlock Holmes covered to get to Florence. We are going to do the same, although we are going to have an easier time and we are doing a couple more stopover. Unlike him, we are not on the run.

So, after lunch we board our coach bus and we start towards Meiringen. We already visited there, thanks to Marcus and Michael's organization, so we can head directly to the *Aareschlucht*, the Aare Gorge. It's an incredible place where you can walk through the canyons excavated by the water and the ice. A 40-minute walk that all the components of the group braved. Even the last, upward, bit.

After the stroll among the beautiful scenery, more joy for the eyes waits for us: the Susten Pass that we missed just one day before because of the bad weather.



Like in the previous days - and although I'm used to it - I'm always surprised at the ease the bus drivers have going through all the curves and the narrow streets. But the result is: we can enjoy the view. There is still a bit of snow over there, adding even more magic to the breathtaking scenery.

The day, though, is not over yet. After getting through the Susten, we arrive in Göschenen. The small town was once an important centre, especially during the building of the Gotthard Railway tunnel, the first, built between 1872 and 1882, so already in service when Holmes was travelling to Florence.



The construction of the gallery took 10 years, the best engineering know-how of the time and the lives of at least 400 workers, killed in accidents or by the consequences of the awful working conditions in the tunnels. Near Göschenen's train station there is a gallery - but without the smoke, the dust and the smell - that replicates the ones where the workers were trapped in for hours on end.

After the visit, we get back to our coach and head to Flüelen. Holmes didn't go there, but we can use a stop at this lakeside village, where we can enjoy a nice dinner in a *wintergarten* chatting around a tasteful dish.

DAY 2 - MONDAY, THE 4th OF OCTOBER

We start towards the train station, ready to head to Airolo. We have to change in Erstfeld, then we can enjoy the view. The faster trains now go through the Gotthard-Basis tunnel. Recently inaugurated it is 57 kilometers long, but going that way would deprive us of the sight. Moreover, we want to go through the same tunnel Holmes went through. The sight is going to be a bit different, though: we are going to see more things (the highway and most buildings weren't there at the time) and better (no cloud of smoke because the trains run on electricity, now). One thing Holmes surely saw, was the church in Wassen, there since 1742 and pretty famous at the time already. It is known because, when travelling on the old Gotthard's route, you can see it from three different perspectives, due to the fact that the rails are spiralling down to the tunnel's entrance.



We then arrive in Airolo, the other side of the tunnel, the gateway to the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland. We stop at the Caseificio, the local cheese factory. After having tasted raclette last Friday evening, it could be interesting to have an idea of how cheese is made. It is not the same one you use for raclette, but it's tasty anyway. For lunch, though, I opt for *polenta e brasato* a typical regional dish, here in my Ticino.

Another stop Holmes - what a pity - didn't make, was Rodi. There, we take the cable car to get to the Tremorgio lake, an alpine scenery not to be missed. The weather is not as nice as the day before, but it's not raining and that - when you are on the mountains - is good weather.

The cable car climbs a very steep cable and it's not easy to sit in there if you're afraid of heights. The best way is to look up when going up, and do the same when you're going down. The wall of the mountain is far more reassuring than the breathtaking sight of the valley below.

Once on top, a few steps bring us to the lakeside. It is an artificial lake formed by glacial erosion and since the beginning of the 20th century, its waters are exploited to produce electricity. The same energy that helped our cable car bring us on top.

When there, we walk around the water surface, enjoying the sight, the fresh air, and avoiding to get too close to the cows pasturing there.



Afterwards, a drink in the *capanna* - the typical mountain lodge, where you can find a bed and some food - before going back down. There, our coach bus is waiting for us. Next stop: Biasca, for dinner.

We don't see much of the city, because it is already dark. Biasca, though, is sitting between three valleys and up to the half of the 19th century it was a centre of strategic importance. Holmes surely passed by: after Airolo, this is the first big centre you would encounter on your way south and a stop was required to load the locomotive with coal or to change the horses pulling your cab.

After a nice dinner, we move to Arbedo. The hotel was a bit of a surprise...and a challenge. Completely automatics. No receptionist, no way to make the shower work. But tomorrow we're going back to the old times. Well, more or less. There will be castles, but also a TV crew following us.

DAY 3 - TUESDAY, THE 5th OF OCTOBER



Bus to Bellinzona, the capital city of Ticino. The idea is to visit the three castles, part of the UNESCO heritage. We arrive at the train station, where Lisa and Filippo (and Fabio, not in the picture) are waiting for us. Holmes, from the train, surely saw the castle. We are lucky enough to be able to visit the place.

The idea was to visit all of them, but the interviews and the recording of the report for our friends takes a lot of time. Time well spent! And lots of fun, too!

After all this work, we can move to the *Grottino ticinese* for some more typical food from the region. Risotto and ossobuco are waiting for us after a 15-minutes stroll to get there.

You can't enjoy the risotto, but you can have a look at what the filming of a report on Sherlockians is.



After lunch, we board the train and move towards Lugano, more or less my hometown. The Hotel Victoria (how appropriate!) is waiting for us. We take advantage of our time in the city: a stroll along the lake, a bit of shopping in town and, for me, a live connection with one radio program to talk about the trip.

It is a relaxing evening, one that Holmes, being on the run, couldn't enjoy, but we did it for him and with a toast to the Great Detective that brought us together on this trip.

DAY 4 - WEDNESDAY, THE 6th OF OCTOBER

Getting to the train station, then to Como and in the end to the pier in the lakeside city, was a bit stressful, but in the end here we are, cruising on Lake Como heading to Tremezzo for a visit to Villa Carlotta, with one of the nicest botanical gardens ever and a great exposition of classical sculptures hosted in the building, which is itself a real beauty.

We have lunch there, then some of us can enjoy a bit more time visiting around. The others will get back to the city and then head a bit in advance to Milan. They are the lucky ones who got the tickets for La Scala, where also Irene Adler sang. We meet again for dinner at *L'Osteria del treno* a typical Milanese restaurant not far from the train station - the Stazione Centrale where Holmes might have changed the train to get to Florence - where the wooden interiors and the pictures of steam locomotives adds a touch of atmosphere to our dinner.



DAY 5 - THURSDAY, THE 7th OF OCTOBER

Milan. A whole day in Italy's capital of fashion and economics. But for us, is a city full of myths, history and the place where many known murders happened. We learn about Milan's Jack the Ripper and the story of the huge mastiff (sounds familiar?) who killed a girl's kidnapper. There is the Gucci murder but also the story of Milan's greatest detective, Tom Ponzi. All this starting from the Navigli, where we find a connection between Florence, our next stop, and the northern city. A murder where the victim was found in Milan and the killer in Tuscany's capital. Then we visit the church of Saint Eustorgio and some of us have a look at the incredible Cappella Portinari, that hosts the Saint's remains.

Some of us go straight to the city centre, where you can have a look at the Duomo, while some other take an alternative route to see the Basilica di Sant'Ambrogio, dedicated to Milan's patron saint. Many legends are tied to his figure, but we are Sherlockians, so maybe more interested about real life stories. The nearby standing Catholic University of the Sacred Heart is the scene of a crime happened in 1971 and still unsolved. Care to try and figure this out?

Lunch at the Victoria restaurant (where else could we go?) and then a stop in Piazza Alla Scala to have a look at the Opera house, then on through Galleria Vittorio Emanuele and its poor Bull that has to pay a price to give luck to the passers-by. The Piazza Duomo where we give a nice look at the white marbles and the golden Virgin Mary standing on top, to finish the tour at Castello Sforzesco, home of the then lords of the city.

But there is no staying in Milan without an *aperitivo*, so we stop to get one before going to the hotel to get our luggage and then move to the train station to get our train to Florence. The railway route is different from the one used in Holmes' time and, moreover, now we have a very fast train that takes us to Florence in a bit less than two hours, much less than the time needed in Holmes' era.