

Zermatt, Switzerland 2015

Hi Everyone

Better late than never

I know a lot of you have been wondering why there have not been any daily ramblings and photographs and had cause for concern over my wellbeing with not hearing from me. All I can do is apologise it was with best intentions that armed with my new tablet that Barbara bought me for Christmas, that this would make life a little easier and save taking a heavier laptop with me. I should have tested the system beforehand. I had instruction books and the necessary cables to connect my card reader to the tablet but for some reason the card reader was not recognised so I was unable to send any serious photographs. I am informed that the link cables can be very temperamental so I am thinking that the cable is the problem and as a consequence I have ordered replacements. In addition I could not bring up my group emails so those are the excuses out of the way.

Having arrived home a couple of nights ago I am putting together the brief highlights and a summary along with some of my images which I hope you will enjoy considering the suffering for my art in the cold and windy conditions in the high Alps and also having to watch a very boring Everton game on the TV one night"" Sorry to all the Everton Supporters.

Monday 12th January 2015

Well I left home at 5:30 am en route to Manchester Airport to catch the 8:40 Swiss flight to Zurich. All went well although we were late taking off due to the lateness of the inbound flight which had encountered severe head winds. The pilot apologised for the delay and informed us that we would have the wind behind us and as a consequence we would make up time en route to Zurich. As a result we were only 10 minutes late arriving in Zurich. That said I suppose we were unlucky as when I arrived at the carousel we were placed behind a Russian flight which took an absolute age to unload its luggage. So eventually the luggage from our flight started to come through. I was only waiting for one bag as my skis and boots go separately using the Flyrail system and go direct to Zermatt and my hotel. I collected my bag and hot footed it to the rail station which is located below the arrivals hall. I did not have much time and was convinced that I would not make it, anyway when I arrived at the platform the lights were flashing indicating the train was about to leave and at that point I had conceded that I would not get on the train. Well the guard who was by the door beckoned me forward so after all I got on the train by a whisper. It was by coincidence that only the night before Barbara & I had been to the theatre with George & Jane and exactly the same thing happened bearing in mind that this was the last train and missing it meant the dreaded bus replacement service as a consequence of the ongoing railway modifications. The journey through Switzerland is very scenic and relaxing and as with most Swiss transport systems they are known for running a very efficient service that tends to always run on time. The rail journey takes 3hrs 33 minutes with just one change. So time to relax and listen to some music and enjoy the emergency rations that Barbara had put together for me. The only change is at Visp where we join the Matterhorn Bahn Railway; its train was waiting to take us up from

the valley floor up to Zermatt at a height of 1620m. Zermatt once a small village is now a busy little holiday resort with numerous hotels, Chalets, luxury apartments and a good range of shops and restaurants. This thriving resort is most renowned for its location to the Matterhorn which is quoted as being the most photographed mountain in the world (I can vouch for that) anyway this year Zermatt is celebrating the 150th anniversary of the first successful ascent of the Matterhorn (4478m) by English man Edward Whymper and his team. 150 years ago there was a race in effect to be the first to climb the Matterhorn. With an Italian team climbing from the Italian side and the team led by Edward Whymper climbing from the Swiss side via the Hornli Ridge. Whymper and his team were successful however on the way down a rope snapped and 4 men out of the seven man team were tragically killed. Edward Whymper survived the ordeal along with the two Peter Tugwalder's (Father and Son). Three days later an Italian team was successful in climbing the Matterhorn from the Italian side. It should also be noted that the Matterhorn was one of the last main peaks in the Alps to be climbed. A bit of local history that in 1860 three brothers from Liverpool Alfred, Charles & Sanbach Parker attempted to climb the Matterhorn but had to give up and turn back after reaching a height of 3,700m. The record for making the fastest ascent of the mountain is an amazing 1 hour 56 minutes.

As the train climbs ever higher towards Zermatt the train is assisted by a cog system which assists the train in climbing the steepest parts of the railway. The snow becomes thicker on the ground until everything is white. We eventually arrive in Zermatt at 1613hrs. Zermatt is car free and relies on electric milk float type vehicles converted to taxis to move people around. A short walk across the station square and I am at my Hotel, the Hotel Gornergrat Dorf I am welcomed by Mark & Josianne Schneider-Perren the owners, Mark was up until a few years ago was one of the local fire chiefs so we occasionally converse about the special aspects relating to fire safety, especially when you consider the access problems to the timber properties which are located so very close together, and present a high risk of fire spread to adjoining properties.

Just before 1900 hrs my skis and boots arrived so they were placed in the heated ski room ready for the morning. So after a very long day I enjoyed my evening meal and then unpacked before going to bed for a welcome rest.

For my photographer friends I was equipped with a Canon 1D Mk 3 body, 16/35 L lens, 24/105 L Lens and a 70/200 L lens which all fits in to my backpack. In addition I carry a Sony RX100 compact camera in my pocket.

It is now Tuesday and I take the 0824 hrs Gornergrat train up to its summit at 3,100m. The train winds up the mountain side weaving through tunnels and then giving stunning views of the high Alps which is of course is dominated by the Matterhorn at 4478m. For those not aware the Matterhorn inspired the Toblerone chocolate bar another bit of useless information I thought you should know. Well It is my intention only to ski half the day so as not to strain the legs too much. So I do a number of easy leisurely runs just to get the legs working. Zermatt has 3 main ski areas (Sunnegga, Gornergrat and Matterhorn Paradise and also access to the Italian slopes) I have attached a map of the ski areas to give you an idea of where I am. These areas are not all easily connected together but there are some routes which allow you

to traverse from one to the other. The problem being that in high winds there is the potential for cable cars to be closed and as a consequence you may have ski routes that you had not intended. So after skiing a few easy blue runs I decided to ski across to the Sunnegga area using a nice red run, my intention being to ski in this area and do a circuit which takes you to the large cable car at Gant which takes you up to a height where you can traverse back across to the Gornergrat area. Well you have guessed it; the cable car was closed due to high winds. To describe this type of cable car, this is basically an enormous tin box that is suspended from a cable and is very susceptible to high winds and carries in the region of 150 to 200 persons very close together!! Just an aside there is usually the strong smell of garlic in the air as well as comedians making the sounds of cattle just to put those nervous at ease. So as this lift was closed there was no way of skiing back in to the Gornergrat area so I spent the rest of my time skiing various runs before getting the Sunnegga funicular railway back down to Zermatt. The funicular railway is basically coaches that are attached to a rail which is pulled by a cable through a straight tunnel and it is a very quick means of getting persons up and down the mountain. So a relatively easy day and photographically I only used my little Sony compact camera as there was nothing that made me want to stop and get my main camera out of my backpack.

On Wednesday I again took the early morning mountain train up to Gornergrat, this being my preferred means of travel as it is located closest to my hotel and is more civilised than being crammed in to an electric ski bus again with Garlic smells and also ski tips being pushed up against you. I today did similar runs as yesterday and as the Gant cable car was running up to Hohtalli at 3286m this enabled me to get back to the area after first negotiating the very narrow opening section of the run which has various drops that you don't want to encounter. Protection is provided by safety nets that you don't want to test. This can be a difficult stretch if the piste is all cut up or very icy. Once back on the Gornergrat section after a few runs I take Mountain Railway from Riffleberg leisurely back down to Zermatt. I was making the short walk to my hotel when I heard behind me the sound of a Alpen Horn and when I turned around there were 11 members of an Alpen Horn group getting ready to play some tunes, so I quickly propped my skis up against a wall and strolled over to get some images the only problem they were situated in place which had very contrasty lighting which made it difficult to get good images. So after that little diversion I finally get back to my hotel and after taking my ski boots off and putting on my snow boots I go for a leisurely walk around the village which I find helps to relax the legs and feet, especially after having them clamped in to ski boots for most of the day. Just before my evening meal Mark the manager informed me that the hotel have put me forward for an award as a consequence of having been coming to Zermatt for some 30 years, I filled out the necessary paperwork and was informed to be at the 5 star Zermatterhof Hotel at 5:30 on Thursday. Well this was an unexpected surprise and something to look forward too. The form asked how many guests I would be bringing as I was on my own this was zero, as snow and ice and Barbara do not go together as a consequence of her hip replacements.

On Thursday I again took the mountain train up to Gornergrat where I skied around and then down to Furi. From Furi I took the large cable car up to Trockener Steg which is situated within the Matterhorn Paradise area which is largely on the Theodulgletscher or glacier in English. Due to high winds I was unable to go any higher as the cable car was closed. So I skied back down to Furi on the black run which after negotiating the top section is relatively

easy. Once back at Furi I decided to take the small gondola which carries 6 people up to Schwarzsee. Schwarzsee gives good views of the Matterhorn, from here I decided to ski the leisurely route that takes you to Stefalalp this takes you around the other side of the Matterhorn and as the lighting on the Matterhorn and the Hornli ridge was good so I spent some time taking some photographs. While having a coffee at the Stefalalp restaurant I was informed that all the high lifts were closed so when I arrived at Furi I decided to take Gondola down to Zermatt rather than skiing down this section which can get rather congested at the end of the day. There are some narrow sections and as it gets lower the snow conditions can be poor and this is an area renowned for accidents because of tired skiers racing down to Zermatt. As I was going for my presentation at the Zermatterhof this evening I was happy to get down early so I could get ready for my presentation. So about 17:00 hrs I left my hotel and walked up the main street passing all the shops, restaurants and hotels and as the street widens out there is on the right hand side the Monte Rosa Hotel being the oldest hotel in Zermatt, this is where Edward Whymper stayed and planned his ascent of the Matterhorn. This fact is commemorated by a plaque on the outside of the building. On the left hand side and set back is the very imposing 5 star Zermatterhof Hotel where the rich and famous stay. Those staying here are collected from the station by a traditional stagecoach pulled by either two white or two black horses. So I climb the steps leading in to the hotel where I am greeted by the doorman, my jacket was taken and I was directed in to a room which was set up for the presentation. A number of guests had already arrived as there was to be presentations made to 6 other people. Waiters were available to provide you with drinks, so I decided I would try the red wine which was very nice as you would expect in this standard of hotel. In addition there was a cold buffet made up of Swiss produce. The ceremony was carried out by the Director of Tourism who initially spoke about Zermatt and the awards. As I was the only English person there was the need for him to translate what was being said. The actual presentations began where a few words were said about each recipient and then the award was presented. The award was in the form of a badge to be worn, which is gold and circular and embossed with Zermatt at the top and the Matterhorn in the centre and the word Dankt at the bottom. The last presentation was made to a German gentleman who had been coming to Zermatt for over 40 years. After the presentation was completed and a number of glasses of red wine consumed. I collected my jacket and left the 5 star palace and headed back to my rather basic hotel where I needed to pack my things up as tomorrow I would be heading up to the Kulmhotel for 3 nights which is situated at 3,100m and is one of the highest hotels in Switzerland.

My intention for Friday was to ski in the morning and then come down to Zermatt to collect my things and then get the train back up to Gornergrat and the Kulmhotel. Well the best laid plans were literally blown apart by the weather. I took the train as usual in the morning the weather was overcast with low cloud and as we climbed higher the snow and wind increased. It was obvious that we were heading in to a storm and the effect was that you could feel the train being buffeted by the strong winds, well at approximately 2,900m the train stopped at Rotenboden station and was not to go any further. It was ironic that there were a number of skiers who decided to get off the train to ski down as if there was not a problem. The funny thing was when the doors of the train were opened the wind was blowing the blizzard in to the train. I think being more conscious to risk I stayed put in my seat. There were a number of skiers who realised that the conditions were extremely hostile and decided that the train was

the safer option they literally got blown back on to the train. The train eventually went back down the mountain to Zermatt and I was later informed that all trains and lifts had been closed for the day. With this knowledge it was obvious that I would not be able to go up to the Kulmhotel today so I checked that I was ok to stay in my hotel in Zermatt which it was. I decided to go to the local English pub called Potters Bar for some lunch. I had just ordered a curry when my mobile phone rang and it was the Kulmhotel enquiring about my location and then informing me to my surprise that there would be a special train at 2pm. As it was about 1:15 I had to cancel my curry and get to my hotel and collect my main bag, skis, ski boots and rucksack. At the station I got on the train but was informed that I would have to change to another train at Riffleberg at 2,500m. Well at Riffleberg I unloaded my bags and was directed to an old train which comprised of a single unit but on the front of it was a very large snowplough / blower train. Well we set off very slowly bearing in mind we were in a blizzard and high winds, there was snow flying in every direction and you could not see a thing. The train was travelling at a very slow speed and would stop and then start and you could hear what I presume were instructions coming over the radio from the snow plough crew, to the train crew and also to the two piste rescue people who were also on the train. The only other people who were on the train were hotel guests and some hotel staff who did not seem alarmed by the situation as it presumably happens quite often during the winter. Well eventually we arrived; it was now about 200m walk up hill to the sanctuary of the hotel. So I got all my luggage to a lift station where there are 3 lifts along side each other. So I put my skis in to the first lift and as I went to get my other two bags but the lift doors closed. I could not get the doors to open even though the lift had not gone up to the next level. Pressing the lift button only made the other two lifts open but not the one with my skis in. So eventually I got in to the next lift and took my bags up to the next level. Then I played around with the buttons until eventually my skis came up. What a pollava presumably the lifts work in a sequence that ensures they get an even use. So now that I had all my bags it was now about 50m to the front door of the hotel. Easier said than done, one thing for sure that wheelie bags / cases do not work in snow. Well it was nice to get in to the warmth of hotel and to be able to relax with a warm drink and a delayed lunch.

The forecast for Saturday was very heavy snow and as a consequence we were snowed in for 24 hours. So I spent the day watching TV and reading. The app on my phone informed me that tomorrow Sunday the weather would be glorious with clear skies and sunshine and it was spot on. With that knowledge I would arrange to get out before breakfast to capture the sunrise. This is best viewed from a viewing platform located up a steepish path about 150m above the hotel. This gives a 360 degree view of the 29 peaks above 4,000m which is dominated by the Matterhorn 4478m. The Matterhorn stands out basically because of its distinctive shape but it is not the highest peak that is the Monte Rosa which is 4650m and the highest in Switzerland. So the sunrise was good but not as good as last year, it was very cold and after an hour of taking photographs I was glad to get inside and have a lovely breakfast. As the weather was lovely and clear I spent the morning skiing and taking photographs and in the afternoon I decided to do one of the high walking trails. I timed this so that it would coincide with the sun going down this was a good plan that enabled me to get some different images although I just missed a train back up to my hotel and I had to wait just under an hour for the next one.

On Monday I was changing hotels again basically going back to my hotel in Zermatt. So I skied in the morning before transferring hotels in the afternoon.

On Tuesday I took the train up the mountain and skied around and down to Furi where I took the gondola up to Schwarzsee and skied back to Furi where I took the gondola back up to Riffleberg and then took the train up to Rotenboden. The easy run from Rotenboden which was my last run and half way down I hit some ice which through me a little and I think I over corrected and as a consequence I took a tumble, both my skis ejected which they are meant to do and I was left face down in the snow, this being my only visit into the scenery during the holiday. I picked myself up no injuries thankfully and then brushed all the snow off me. I gathered my skis and reset the bindings then put my skis back on and then skied to the bottom of the run where I took the train down to Zermatt. Back at

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I hope you will enjoy my travels and my observations.

Another apology that two days before leaving Switzerland I started to have some pain in one of my teeth, any way I asked Barbara to get me an appointment with my dentist for Thursday, well the pain got worse and worse and I had a swelling in my gum which was noticeable by the inflammation in the side of my mouth and cheek. When I saw my dentist he diagnosed an abscess and prescribed numerous antibiotics and pain killers which I have now started to do their job and I am feeling a little more normal. So this has again delayed this story going out to you.

These images have only had very basic adjustments made in Adobe Lightroom, monochrome conversions have been made in Silver Efex Pro2. It is my opinion that the monochrome images give a more dramatic representation of such a dramatic landscape where the colour images although natural do not portray what can be a very severe and dramatic environment. I am pleased to answer any questions on my images and this type of photography. I trust you will enjoy my travels and my observations.

In conclusion I have changed the link cables on my tablet and everything now works and is ready for my up and coming travels to Venice and Norway

Martin