



# ALPS TOUR 2009

Friday 06/19 - Arrival



After an uneventful flight we landed in Zürich, where my brother in law and his wife picked us up. Our luggage made it safely and we emerged through customs unharmed.

Joachim and Dorothee had parked just outside the terminal and with 2 cars the luggage did fit just nicely. I noticed a Swiss cop cruising around us and as soon as we were ready for departure he approached Dorothee mentioning that the car seat for Thomas (4 years), who wanted to pick us up as well, was not approved for Switzerland.

Dorothee argued that it was a legal car seat for Germany and that she had never heard about a different certification for Switzerland. The cop told her that he wouldn't issue a citation but that she would have to get a different car seat for her next trip to the Alps colony. What did he expect? That you travel with multiple car seats every time you cross a border? What a jerk ...



It was an easy drive to Emmingen where we were welcomed by my in-laws and treated to Weisswürste, Pretzels, champagne, and coffee.



As the weather was changing and rain was a possibility we decided for an early afternoon pick-up of the 3 rented bikes at BMW Grüneberg in Villingen. The bikes were already waiting for us and for the first time I saw a BMW F800R in person.



As the sales person entered our information in the system, Kurt's and my Visa credit card were both declined for the \$1,000 deposit. What a start to our trip as we had to call customer service in the US. We called the numbers on the back of our cards and I was connected to a knowledgeable representative, who was noticing the charge instantly and told me that their security department had flagged it. He removed the flag and I told him that I would stay in Europe till 07/03. He told me to try the card again and it worked.

Kurt ended up with a representative in India and he tried his card after the guy's o.k. without success. He called back again and talked to several supervisors, none of them seemed to find a fix. He tried his credit card several times but the charge just wouldn't go through. Finally, he got the problem worked out and after installing side bags to Dennis' bike we were on our way to Emmingen. It started to rain slightly but no need for rain gear. Was it the start for a wet week? I was pretty much concerned as the weather forecast showed possible rain for every day in Aix-les-Bains and the upcoming weekend.

We rode the bikes back to Emmingen and then Peter and Jim jumped in the car with the destination - BMW Auer in Stockach, where they picked up their rental bikes without incident.



A short ride to the hotel Lochmühle in Eigeltingen in some light rain and we were ready for some good German food and beer.



## Saturday 06/20 – Lake of Constance 150km/ 95 mi

Since Joachim had to cancel his participation in the ride to France he decided to get his H-D Sportster 1200 inspected. He had not ridden the H-D for an entire year (I can't blame him ...) but was eager to get his baby out the garage.



Joachim and I picked up the rest of the gang at the hotel and we decided to take an easy ride near the Lake of Constance. We took Rt.31, a nice sweeping road but with heavy traffic via Stockach, Überlingen to Meersburg and hopped onto the car ferry to Constance. Dennis found out that he had forgotten to pack his gps mount and charger for his new Gamin 660 and that it was probably sitting safely in the kitchen of his McLean house. We visited a bike shop I have known for a long time in the hope that they might have a suitable mount. The owner couldn't help us but we detected a nice motorcycle map showing some great routes near the Lake of Constance. He suggested a nice route around the Säntis via the Schwäg Alp for Sunday. As we were thirsty and hungry I suggested a stop at a biergarten right at the sailing harbor and behind the central train station in Constance.



There was a lot of construction in town and some streets were totally new to me. I missed a left turn along the Saubach and ended up at the Swiss border. No other way as to go through the border, go around a roundabout and reenter into Germany. As we needed Vignettes for travelling the Swiss autobahn anyhow we stopped and took care of it. Funny, the Vignette costs Euro 30 less 2 Swiss Francs, man what a calculation! The cash payers ended up with a nice 2 Franken coin which I wanted to donate to the Swiss border guard coffee fund. They initially took the bribe but returned the money after I wanted to leave the scene. They probably got some cold feet...







We went around the roundabout and back into Germany and made the correct right turn at the first intersection.

We rode through town to the harbor but there was not really any parking available for the bikes - just a bunch of tourist busses with a lot of space in between them. I asked 2 adjacent drivers if they would mind if we parked our bikes right between their busses and they had no objection. We walked a short distance to the biergarten enjoying some good German food and some cold drinks.

Upon returning to our bikes a police car was already awaiting us. Peter started talking to them in English and this forced them into the defensive. They tried to tell Peter that it was illegal parking between the buses and that we should find another parking spot. We told them we are on our way out and they let us go.

We spent the evening in the Lochmühle with my in-laws, Dorothee and the kids. At the time there was a wedding and the kids, especially Alexandria wanted to dance as well.





## Sunday 06/21 – Schwäg Alp 200 km/ 125 mi



We crossed the border to Switzerland in Constance and rode up the mountains to the Schwäg Alp. On a sunny day it's a beautiful ride with some breathtaking views of the Lake of Constance. We found a nice restaurant at the foot of the Säntis and enjoyed some good hot drinks as it was still pretty cool. Shortly after it started to rain and the clouds came down dramatically. Instead of riding twisty roads around the Säntis we decided to ride back on the major road via Wattwil and Wil. The weather actually improved after a short time and the sun came out occasionally. Joachim wanted to ride the F800R so I had to ride his H-D Sportster.

As I wanted to treat the gang for some great Lake of Constance fish we went for an early dinner to the Ruppenaner brewery in Constance. They offered Felchenfilet in almond butter which is a local speciality and good German Black Forest cake.



As we were sitting outside enjoying our food some dark clouds started showing up threatening to become a major thunderstorm which is not uncommon for that area. Sure enough a short time later the wind picked up and some serious rain started to fall. We moved inside the restaurant awaiting the thunderstorm to pass. The chef treated us with a local liqueur to shorten our wait. A short time later the thunderstorm had passed and the sun came out again. We headed out and returned to the hotel with just a few sprinkles reaching us.





## Monday 06/22 – Ride to Aix-les-Bains 560 km/ 350 mi

We started our tour to Aix-les-Bains at around 9 am and after passing the Swiss border at Thayingen and riding through Schaffhausen we jumped onto the highway towards Zürich, Bern, and Vevey. Traffic was quite heavy around Zürich, as expected, as we entered the Nordring. It started raining slightly and then the rain got heavier quickly. We stopped at a gas station to put our rain gear on. Another bike wash was received near Bern and the temperature was only in the 60s. The heated grips were very welcome for most of the ride as the weather stayed dry but cool. We stopped near Martigny at a nice highway rest stop for some food and drinks before heading towards Chamonix across the Col de la Forclaz pass. We briefly lost Dennis right before the border into France and our first view of the Mont Blanc was covered as usual in clouds. There was still quite some snow up there and the glaciers looked magnificent. The glaciers are a great photo treat and we continued our ride through Chamonix towards Albertville and Ugine. Just before Ugine the road was closed and we were forced a detour through some small roads. Kurt was starting to feel tired and wanted to take a break. Well, the first restaurant I spotted turned out to be a McDonalds and I treated my friends to a good American meal. All the sudden it felled much warmer and we enjoyed the late day sun. As it started to darken we jumped onto the toll road towards Chambéry and then continued on to Aix-les-Bains. Our navigation devices let us straight to the hotel next to the Petite Harbor. We enjoyed a nice cold beer and Dennis treated himself to fresh oysters at the Skiff Pub across our hotel.





Tuesday 06/23 - Lac de Serre-Poncon 440 km/ 275 mi



After a nice breakfast at our hotel we started our tour via Chambéry to Grenoble on the highway. As we ran low on fuel we left the highway and found a gas station in a small village. From there we continued on some rural roads, which followed the hilly landscape and offered nice long sweepers paired with some twisty stretches and no traffic at all. Coming down through the woods on some sweepers we reached a dam with a smaller lake. We stopped right in the middle of the dam and realized how deep the forge was, my guess is more than 100 m. After taking some pictures we continued on the rural roads to La Mure where we enjoyed some great crepes in a small creperie.



We continued our ride via Gap to the Lac de Serre-Poncon. What a beautiful lake with gorgeous green water, with mountains on one side and a small island with a church on it. The roadway crosses the lake right in the middle from where we saw not only sailboats and windsurfers but also power surfers and wind gliders. We arrived in Briacon and followed the road towards Grenoble. About 15 km later we took a sharp right turn onto the Route des Grandes Alpes. The road narrowed, the tarmac was bumpy, no railings secured the road and we climbed up quickly to the 2645m high peak. The temperature sank from a cozy 23 C to 5 C within minutes and a stiff wind reminded us about the altitude.







On top, we had a great view to both sides of the peak and the parking lot was filled with bikes, and exotic cars – including some Renault Spiders and Lotus Elise. Jim climbed all the way to the top of the mountain as we awaited his return. Word was he wanted to be as close to his boss as possible. We stopped for a quick coffee in a small restaurant near the peak before heading out again.



The 42 km descent to St. Michel de Maurienne was spectacular all the way as the road winds down in a mixture of sweepers and sharp turns. It was my favorite single road on this trip. Traffic was light and there were countless opportunities for overtaking.

The rest of the day we spent on the old highway to Chambéry. We ran into a slight problem as our gas tanks emptied quickly and there was no gas station anywhere in sight. Finally, with only 11 km range left showing in my display we found one at a closed shopping center. We tried reading the display of the automated system as the system refused our credit cards and even my German EC card, which should normally work. After several attempts the system finally decided to accept my EC card and we all filled up in one filling. From there it was only a short ride back to our hotel. Our evening ended in a nice pizzeria right underneath our hotel. A group of about 25 teenagers all with scooters filled a huge table next to us and we had fun listening to them. As they got ready to leave some girls approached us and one mentioned that she had overheard us speaking English and that she was actually from England.







## Wednesday 06/24 – Col de Iseran 425 km/ 265 mi



We met as usual around 8 am for breakfast and Dennis told us his back was not doing too well so he decided taking an easy and restful day. Kurt and Peter also didn't want to ride too long as they were still tired from the day before. As the weather was really nice we decided for riding the Col de Iseran near Val d'Iserre and a modified (shorter) return leg as initially planned. To further save some time we decided riding the highway for the first stretch all the way to Bourg. Leaving Albertville, the highway winds up the mountains and offers some great sweepers. You pass through a long tunnel and right after a high and long bridge as the highway turns into a 2 lane road and becomes more spectacular towards Bourg. Traffic was very light and there was no problem passing cars. From Bourg we climbed up the mountain to Val d'Iserre, a magnificent town with mountains on three sides. There was a lot of construction which I attributed to the road just being opened for traffic. Passing through Val d'Iserre we saw several ski lifts which seemed reaching the sky. Snow patches along the road reminded us that winter just had left the area. The road narrowed and we climbed up quickly on an unsecured pass.



Soon we had to stop, as a truck with a trailer didn't make one of the many switchbacks and was stuck right in the curve. No way for cars to go by but fortunately there was enough space for us bikers to slide by. A few minutes later we reached the top of the pass where campers were enjoying the sun and plenty of bikers and bicyclists were posing in front of the altitude sign.





The decent was great and we stopped near Aussois where a huge military fort was standing right at the edge of the forge. We left the highway for a nice trip over the Col de Madeleine to Albertville. I wanted to take a nice ride over the Col de Frene but was stopped by Kurt who didn't want to take another pass as he was exhausted. I convinced him that it shouldn't take much longer over the pass and that we would avoid traffic around Chambéry and I settled for a slow pace to help the guys out. The ride was fantastic as you ride on an elevated plateau through some ancient small towns. From there it was an easy decent right into Aix-les-Bains. Shortly after, we enjoyed dinner on the outside deck of the Skiff restaurant. Peter had trouble pointing to the veal he wanted and ended up with another piece of steak, which he didn't like. In order to get Peter back into mood we enjoyed some great desserts like Crème de Brulee before we settled for the night.







## Thursday 06/25 – 3 Country Tour 500 km/ 310 mi



Kurt, Dennis, and Peter were still tired from the long Wednesday's ride and decided to take it easy for the day. They rode over to Annecy, a beautiful medieval town at the northern tip of the Lake of Annecy and continued for a leisure ride around the proximity. Jim and I on the other hand wanted to take advantage of the great weather and decided to tackle the Aosta tour. As the gps plot pointed to a lengthy ride I suggested taking the time-saving toll road to Albertville. The entrance is just south of Aix-les-Bains and we took our tickets from the automated machine. We rode for a while towards Lyon as the only other option showed Geneve, which would be riding north and I was looking for the intersection towards Albertville. After riding for more than 40 km I stopped as I believed we are going the wrong direction - riding west instead of east. We checked the map, turned around and on the northern stretch we found the correct exit.

Apparently there is no direct connection southwards between A41 and A43 and we had wasted 45 minutes. As we approached another automated toll booth a truck, two lanes next to me started beeping his horn, pointing behind me. First, I had no clue whether he meant me but looking down my bike I noticed the gps cable dragging on the pavement and no gps! I looked behind me and a few meters back was my gps lying on the ground. I got off my bike and the lady in the car behind me shook her head as she couldn't believe her bad luck. I picked up the gps which suffered some scratches but other than that still worked. On top, leaving the toll booth I lost my glove, I parked my bike at the side and walked back up to the toll booth to collect it. Luckily, no car had ran over the glove but I started beginning to believe that it was not going to be my day.





We rode via Albertville to Bourg where the road splits towards the Col. de Petite Bernard and Val d'Isere. We stayed left and enjoyed a great ride up the many switchbacks to the top of the pass and then down to Aosta, Italy. A 18 wheeler got in front of us as we descended from the pass and we had no chance for overtaking. A crazy van driver overtook right in the middle of a right turning tunnel without any sight for oncoming traffic. The driver of the 18 weehler must have known the roads and curves and was using every inch of the entire road. After staying frustrated for several sharp turns behind the truck I finally had my chance for overtaking and from there we enjoyed a great ride down the valley to Aosta.







We turned left towards the Col. de Grandes Bernard and started our climb up some well developed roads. As it was lunch time we left the major road and found a nice local restaurant. We enjoyed a great lunch even so we learned that pizza is only served in the evening. Then we continued over the Col. de Grandes Bernard (2,469 m (8,100 ft)) into Switzerland (Martigny) and a left turn over the Col. de la Forclaz down into Chamonix, France. At Ugine, we turned right towards Annecy as we still didn't want to return to the hotel and we stopped right next to the lake.



At least 20 hang gliders seemed to climb up the mountains on the opposite side of the lake. We talked to a camper from Australia who retired 8 years ago and since then travels Europe every summer for several weeks. He and his wife just returned from Turkey, Bulgaria, and Hungary and they were on their way back to England. We battled the traffic in Annecy and then rode back to the hotel in Aix-les-Bains. My gps wanted to take us via the toll road which we didn't want and instead we took a leisure ride across some small local roads. The others awaited us at the hotel and we jumped right over to a creperie for some sweet deserts as our dinner.





Friday 06/26 – Geneve Area 270 km/ 170 mi



The weather outlook called for some afternoon thunderstorms, a steady cloud cover in the morning kept us thinking about imminent rain and everybody wanted to take an easy, close ride for the day. We settled for the Geneve tour and left the hotel riding north. Our gps guided us right onto a curvy road with the lake on the left and mountains on the right side of the road. Soon, some light rain started coming down and I was considering turning around and heading back to the hotel. Fortunately, the rain stopped rather quickly and we continued riding over the country side until we crossed the border into Switzerland and battled Geneva traffic. We headed for the downtown area right next to the lake. We passed the Patek Philippe museum but I am sure that only Dennis and I would have enjoyed the tour and the others would probably have left us behind.

Motorcycle parking turned out to be easy right at the lake as bikers park their bikes right on the boardwalk. We walked towards the railroad station in search of some watch stores. We found a large motorcycle clothing store with an incredible display of helmets and boots. We headed towards the railway station passing the red light district where the shopping district is not far away. While Dennis and I visited a few stores the others settled on a bench facing a local McDonalds. After all the exhausting shopping we rested in a nice restaurant right down by the lake.







On our short walk back we first were confronted with the authorities as 2 cops on Segways crossed our way. I am not sure whether they were street legal as they didn't have any lights or turn signals! Continuing our short walk to our bikes we passed the Swiss Beach Volleyball tournament with some very attractive young women playing. The sky started to look threatening again and we put our rain gear on just in case before leaving town.



We crossed the border back into France and rode mostly through traffic towards Thonon. There, we turned right and climbed up through a magnificent gorge on some winding roads. The ride towards Annecy was mostly nice but we were faced with some traffic in towns. The sun came out strongly and off the rain gear went. About 15 minutes later we noticed oncoming cars with their lights on, which is a strong indicator for rain ahead and the sky changed quickly and we once more put the rain gear on. It turned out to be the right decision as a few minutes later we got caught in a major thunderstorm with lightning and thunder all around us. We felt sorry for Kurt who had forgotten his rain pants in the hotel and was soaked in his leathers. Dennis and Jim got separated from us as Jim was running out of gas and we stopped shortly after as I needed gas as well. We made it all safely back to the hotel and enjoyed a good pizza and beer for dinner.





Saturday 06/27 - Annecy 200 km/ 125 mi



The weatherman called for showers and thunderstorms again throughout the day, the sky was dark and threatening, so we wanted staying close to the hotel. Peter and Kurt walked into town, Dennis, Jim, and I rode the motorcycle instead. A short while later we all met in the middle of the town. The town was pretty busy and offered some nice shops and restaurants. We entered a toy store with an incredible Ferrari horse display made out of 1:18 chassis. A Ferrari Mondial roared up the street and parked right in front of a local restaurant. We walked down the main street across the open market where locals offered a wide range of cheeses and hams. It got warmer by the minute and the sun came out strong.







Jim and I decided to ride over to Annecy as the other suggested this being worth the trip. We had no rain gear, no map, no gps, only a rough idea which direction to ride. I rode up through the thermal bath section and by magnificent hotels in search of Rt. 911. All we found was Rt. 913 and I remembered that it should hit Rt. 911 eventually. We arrived at Mt. Revard (1538 m) where we found a standing map of the area. We were covered in clouds and couldn't see anything and continued riding along damp roads until we finally hit Rt. 911. We passed Col. Leschaur and left the main road towards Annecy. It turned out to be a fantastic road winding up to the Cret. De Chatillon (1704 m). On the other side the tarmac had been just replaced and we enjoyed a smooth ride down to Annecy. We were faced with some patches of gravel, rocks, and sand all over the road reminding us of a major rain storm which must have ripped through the area shortly before we arrived. We found motorcycle parking right next to the Standesamt only a stone throw away from the town's center.



The town was magnificent and breathtaking, filled with thousands of people and an antique flea market added to the atmosphere. We walked through the main area of Annecy before resting at a creperie next to one of the canals. We continued our walk through town, a paradise for shopping, filled with tourists. A short light rain made us nervous for the ride home but fortunately it turned out to be a quick, short spray and the sun came out again.





We settled for a ride on the eastern side of the lake, passing a group of landing hang gliders who were gliding right over our heads and we wanted to hit Rt. 911 at the south end. We ended up riding some local streets leading to nowhere and finally found a road sign towards Albertville. In Faverges we followed the sign over the Col. De Tamie and then rode along Rt. 201 until finally hitting Rt. 911. We made it back to the hotel without a single drop of rain and enjoyed a good dinner sitting outside right next to the lake.



We met this nice group of ladies in town who wanted to become Jim's dogs.





## Sunday 06/28 – Return to Emmingen 440 km/ 275 mi

We decided avoiding the toll road to Geneve and settled for some country roads. Shortly after Annecy, we ran into a construction side and the detour must have added an hour to our ride. Finally, we reached Geneve and from there we hopped onto the Swiss autobahn via Lausanne towards Bern. We stopped for a break near Avenches and decided instead of riding through Zürich to Villingen to take the autobahn towards Basel and onto Rheinfelden and riding across the Black Forest to Villingen.



We stopped briefly at Schopfheim where I called my son Christian. It turned out that he was visiting his mother in Wehr which is only a few kilometers away. We rode over to Wehr and met with him for some yummy strawberry and raspberry cake.



We continued through the Wehratal to Todtmoos and from there on B 317 all the way to Villingen. Joachim awaited us at the dealership and we safely returned our bikes. From there we drove/rode back to Emmingen, returned the other bikes to BMW Auer in Stockach and then enjoyed a last fantastic meal at my in-laws. We finally drove back to the Lochmühle where they were awaiting the gang for their last night in Germany. It was a fantastic trip of over 3,500 km (2,200 mi) over a period of 10 days.