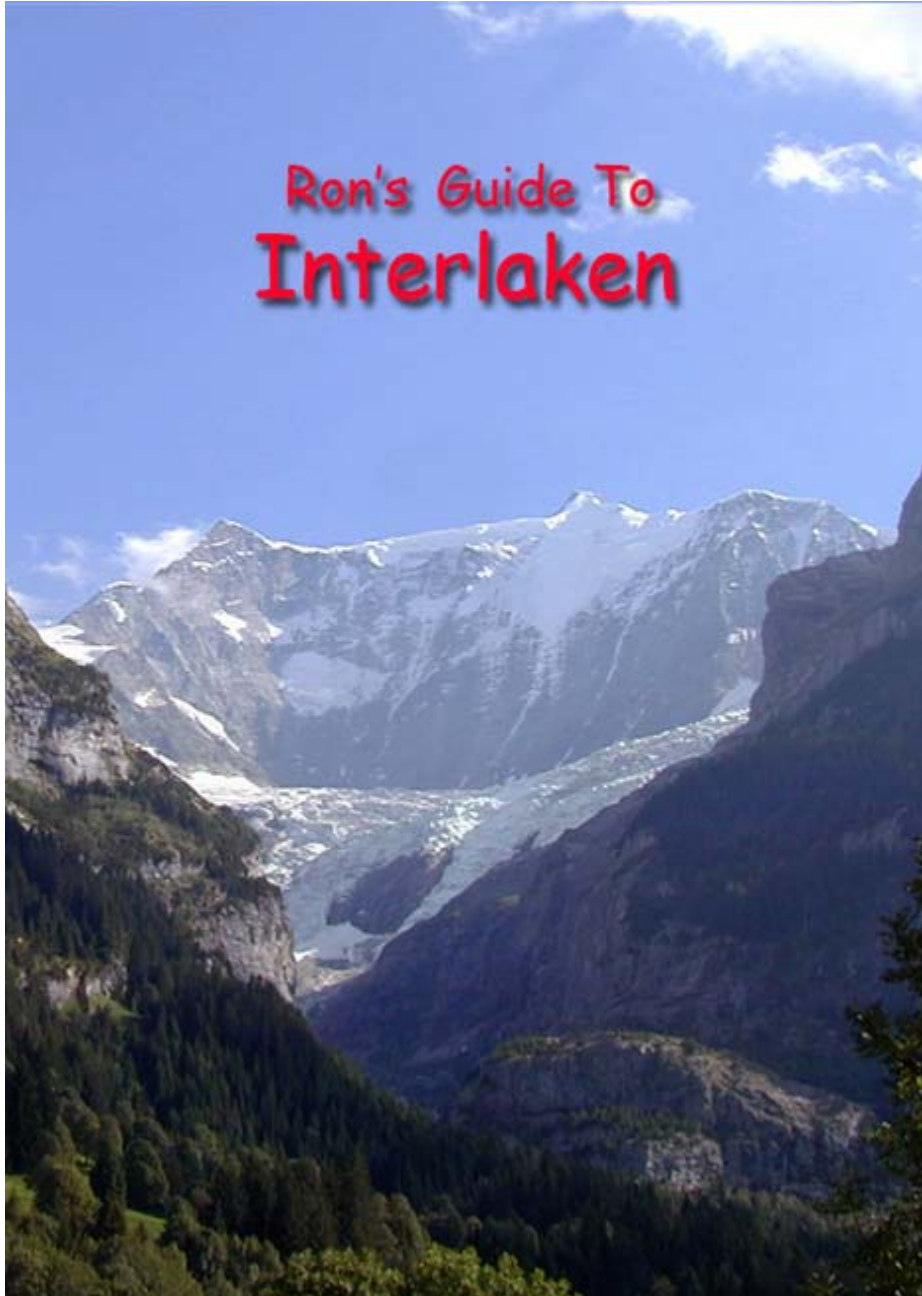


Ron's Guide To Interlaken



One region - at least 1001 options. ----- "Hardly any other region offers outdoor lovers such a range of unspoilt natural splendour as the area known as the Jungfrau Region: magnificent mountains, green valleys and emerald lakes. Rugged gorges, eternal ice, thundering waterfalls, rolling alpine pastures and tucked away mountain lakes. All enhanced by a rich array of leisure and pleasure activities. Nowhere are the Alps so near, so spectacular and yet so safe and accessible as in this Swiss region." A quote from the 'Jungfrau Magazine' - and for once it's all true.

If you are a lover of the outdoors and glorious scenery then Interlaken is for you. In one relatively compact area there is more to see and do than you can possibly take on board in one visit, and is the reason that you will inevitably return again and again, as most people do.

When To Visit

The area has much warmer summers and colder winters than the UK. In general, depending on an early or late spring, from around mid June to the end of July is a good time to visit. The weather should have settled, the mountain flowers will be out and the waterfalls will be at their best.

Campsites

'Camping Hobby' (www.campinghobby.ch) and 'Lazy Rancho' (www.lazyrancho.ch) are excellent sites situated next to each other in green rural surroundings with super views. Both are medium sized, quiet camps, with small shops. Both have very clean toilet facilities with Lazy Rancho's in particular being outstanding. Neither of these campsites will disappoint.

Within 5 minutes walk - Woodland walks, riverside walks, bus stop. Within 15 minutes walk - Hotel / restaurant. Within 30 minutes walk - Town, lakeside, boat station, lido, nature reserve, golf course, two rural hotel/restaurants.



'**Manor Farm**' (www.manorfarm.ch) is a large campsite situated beside Lake Thun having lakeside bathing areas and near to the Neuhaus boat station, lido, and hotel. Typical large site with a good sized restaurant, mobiles for hire, etc. Good facilities and toilets the last time I looked!

Within 5 minutes walk - all the above except the town.

There are other campsites in the area but the above are my recommended ones for views, facilities, etc.



Route

From the UK most people tend to enter Switzerland via Basle. In which case I recommend not entering via the French A35 as this dumps you in the middle of Basle on city roads. Instead stay on the French side of the Rhine (better road and less crowded) and then cross over shortly before Mulhouse on the A36 (signed 'Lorrach') to join the German A5. This route stays on motorway type roads throughout.

On approaching Interlaken on the A8 exit at junction 24 (Unterseen) and follow the Unterseen sign. (This is the nearest access and also avoids going through the town). Continue and in one mile you will come to a roundabout;

For Hobby Camp - Lazy Rancho - Jungfrue - campsites:

Turn right at the roundabout and then shortly left into the narrow road alongside the Golf Hotel opposite the garage

For Manor Farm campsite:

Keep straight on at the roundabout and the site is just past the Neuhaus Hotel on your left in about half a mile.

Notes

Cost. Prices are not as bad in Switzerland as some would have you believe, with one main exception - their transport system. To help overcome this Interlaken have provided a free bus service around the town and there are various fare schemes available to reduce the costs of nearly all the other fares in the region. I recommend consulting the Swiss Tourist Office web-site (myswitzerland.com) for what's available and current prices. Two passes that have proved popular are;

Swiss Half Fare Card. This provides unlimited half fare travel for one month by bus, train, boat, and some cable cars. It costs SF100.00 and must be purchased from the Swiss Tourist Office before entering Switzerland. At the time of writing children up to 15 years old go free when with an adult.

Regional Pass. Another scheme that exists is this seven (or fifteen) day pass. The seven day pass gives you 3 days free travel and 4 days half price travel on consecutive days on most of the transport system, including cable cars (five free and ten half price on the fifteen day). The period starts from the first day of its use. It costs SF 224.00 (7 days) or SF270.00 (15 days) and can be purchased at the resort. It stands to reason that you watch the weather forecasts and choose your period of use carefully.

Which to go for largely depends on what and where you want to go. First timers will probably want to see all the main sights and probably use the transport systems a lot and so should take advantage of the reductions available on the Regional Pass. For a quieter type holiday the Half Fare Card is good value.

Bus Pass. A free bus/train pass (from camp receptions) is available covering Interlaken and outskirts.

Parking for anything larger than a small panel van is going to be difficult (except at Grindelwald Grund) The area is well served by a very efficient transport system and I recommend leaving your motorhome on-site and using this.

Walking Paths are excellently signposted, and are time, not distance, based,.

The same train from Interlaken East station serves both Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen and then splits further up-line. Make sure to board the correct half for your chosen destination!

If your cycling remember that you can always take to a lake steamer if you run out of puff. You will be expected to hold back and be last on - last off.

Motorhome Dealer - with services and accessory shop.

On approaching Interlaken West station from the campsite direction; turn right into the small car park immediately before the rail crossing. Stay over to your left alongside the railway-line and drive to the end of the road. There is often parking for a couple of motorhomes along here but, don't blame me if not!

Refreshments. Nearly every mountain top destination in the area has a cafe/restaurant for refreshments

Things to do - Near Camp

Walk to Neuhaus (2) (Boat Station, Lido, Hotel, Restaurant, Water Sports) via the river path.

Turn left past Lazy Rancho towards the trees and river. Turn left and follow the riverbank alongside the Lombach as it flows into the lake. You can also cross the river and take a longer stroll/ cycle through the trees. (30 minutes walking).



Luegibruggli. (try saying that after a few glasses!) for afternoon tea?

If you look up to the rear of Lazy Rancho/Hobby you will see a hotel clinging to the mountainside. It provides refreshments on its balcony which overhangs the valley and gives marvellous views over the local area and lake, etc. To get there take the Beatenburg road from Interlaken, or bus, as parking is tight. You can also walk up from the river crossing behind Lazy Rancho - if your fit.

Sundlauenen (3)

Small lakeside hamlet with own boat station. Nice 'find your feet' walk to there from Manor Farm. About 30 minutes, or from Lazy Rancho / Camping Hobby (1hour).

Start from Manor Farm campsite restaurant where the Sundlauenen walk is signposted on the roadside opposite. From the sign walk gently upwards through trees above the road. Good views down on camp and lake. Rejoin road when it rises to meet you and walk beside the lake in the Thun direction. Further on the path descends left where signposted, then through trees, over a bridge and through the hamlet to its tiny boat station. Boat back to Neuhaus or Interlaken? Or you can walk up from centre of the hamlet to the main road for a bus (15 min) .



Interlaken, and/or Bonigen on lake Brienz. A pleasant woodland and riverside stroll.

From Hobby or Lazy Rancho. Walk up the road past the farmhouses on your right and then continue into the trees. Follow the fitness trail through the trees and alongside allotments on your right and then cut across the farm track to gain the main Beatenberg road. Turn right and head towards Interlaken. In approx 200 yards take the footpath on your left which will take you through woodland hard against the mountain. Follow the path to its end, turn right and you have reached Interlaken (45 minutes).

For Bonigen, turn left at the end of the footpath and shortly right alongside Hotel Goldey to gain the riverside promenade. Turn left and follow the river until you come to the road bridge. Cross the bridge, go round Interlaken East boatstation on your left and continue alongside the river to Bonigen (approx two hours from Lazy Rancho/Hobby). Hotel 'Seehotel' has a nice terrace overlooking the lake to take refreshments. Retrace your steps or bus back.



St Beatus Caves (3)

Above Sundlauenen on the Thun road. Waterfall, Caves, Stalactites. Nicely done.

Harder Kulm (5)

Fine local viewpoint above Interlaken gained via a century old funicular railway from near Interlaken East station. Hotel and restaurant.

Nature Reserve & Golf Course (7)

Another nice walk/cycle from Neuhaus alongside the lake and boat canal into Interlaken (1.5 hours).

Heimwehfluh.

Funicular ride to 680 metres. Toboggan run back down (adults and children) if you wish. Views. Model train display.

Seilpark.

Tree-top assault course. Great fun for older children, or young adults! Situated just past Heimwehfluh.

Paragliding?

Relax with a cup of coffee whilst watching the antics of the paragliders landing right in the centre of town opposite the Grand Hotel Victoria Jungfrau. They are well organized to bring you down on a tandem flight if you fancy it. The writer was once into the sport and can recommend a flight if you want to know why birds sing! Another local landing area is near to Hotel Golf.

Eating Out

Co-op and Migros Supermarkets

Both have cheap and cheerful restaurants during shopping hours.

Hotel 'Chalet Oberland'. On main street, Near Post Office.

Good food, international, 'fondue', etc, at reasonable cost.

Restaurant 'Marcato' Behind Hotel Chalet Oberland above. Good, cheap, pizza, pasta, etc.

Hotel 'Golf' Just down the road from the campsites. Dearer. Also for an evening stroll for a tippie.

Hotel 'Neuhaus' At the lake boat station near the campsites. Nice food/surroundings.

The above are just a few suggestions, there are dozens of choices at all price levels.

Events

The William-Tell Open Air Theatre (Performances throughout the season).

International Truck & Country Festival (June).

Jungfrau Music Festival (July).

Alphorn Mountain Festival (August) Beatenberg.

International Jungfrue Marathon (September). From Interlaken to Kleine Scheidegg.

Things To Do - Further Out.

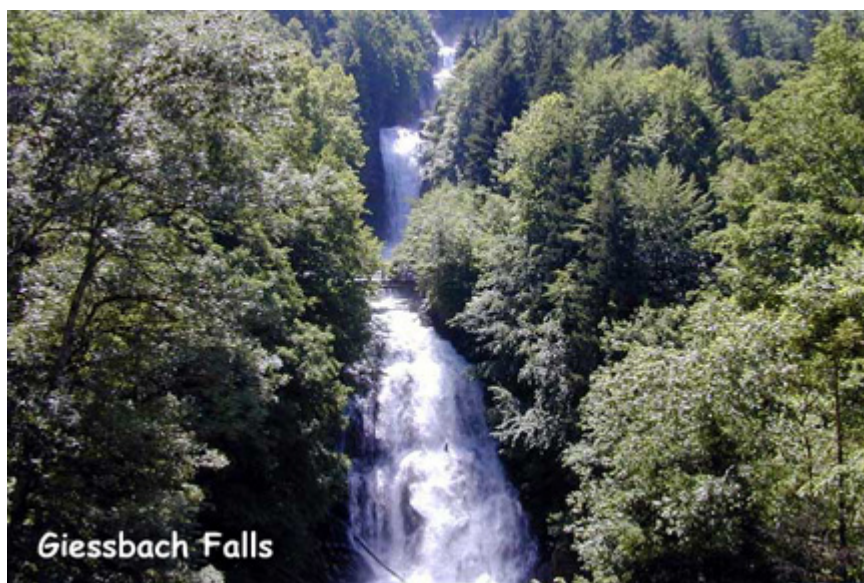
Giessbach Falls (9)

A series of waterfalls in a lovely setting. Walk up the left side of the falls from the hotel, pass behind the fall, and follow the footpath back down to the boat station. A meal or drink from the hotel terrace gives fine views over Lake Brienz.

By car or train to Brienz. One boat stop to Giessbach Falls boat station and then up on 125 year old funicular railway to reach the falls and hotel.

By boat all the way from Interlaken East Station.

By bike (see cycling page).



Schynige Platte (10).

A high mountain viewpoint that takes in the whole area of Interlaken, the valleys of Grindelwald and Lauterbrunnen, and both lakes. Alpine garden and also a starting point for some classic walks in the area (the hard ones that is!). Reached by interesting mountain railway ride up from Wilderswil station.

Lauterbrunnen (11)

Alpine village set in a steep glacier cut valley which, at the right time of the year, has more than twenty waterfalls, and some at all times.

If you are exploring the valley by car, but want to stop at the village, ignore the multi-story car park on your left as you arrive (this one is best for long stay visits if you are making onward train journeys.) Instead drive through the village to another car park just after you take a sharp left turn. This is ideal for the main waterfall and the nice walk along a car free road on the right of the valley to the Trummelbach Falls (1 hour) and Stechelburg. There is a good campsite here and several minor ones along the valley floor. However, you do lose the sun early due to the valley's sheer sides.

Reached by car, bus, train and cycle track from Interlaken.



Trummelbach Falls (19)

Waterfalls inside the mountain. Reached by a lift system which connects to the viewing galleries. The raw power of these falls have to be seen, and heard! Take a wet jacket.

Reached by car, bus, cycle, direct, or train to Lauterbrunnen and then bus along the valley. Perhaps not by motorhome due to parking, - park at Lauterbrunnen and then bus - or walk as above.

Shilthorn (21)

This is the mountain with the revolving restaurant at its peak - of 007 fame. A good cable car ride but little to do once up there unless you intend walking down to the middle station or to Murren (5-7 hours)

The base cable-car station for the Shilthorn is at Stechelberg (20) at the end of the Lauterbrunnen valley. Train to Lauterbrunnen then bus along the valley. Or car, bus, cycle, motorhome perhaps, direct.

Wengen (17)

Car free mountain village only reached by mountain railway or cable car from Lauterbrunnen, or cable car from the Mannlichen ridge via Grindelwald. Better in the winter as a ski resort.

Murren (18)

Another car free village clinging to the mountain edge above the Lauterbrunnen valley. Reached by cog railway from Lauterbrunnen or cable car from Stechelburg at the far end of the valley.

Grindelwald (12)

Is the mountain village gem in the area and the major walking centre. Set in superb surroundings and overlooked by the north wall of the Eiger. The start of many excursions both cheap and costly.

Note that Grindelwald has two train stations with similar names, Grindelwald (Dorf) and Grindelwald (Grund). Parking for a motor home will be a problem in the village itself but there is ample space at Grindelwald Grund. This is the base station area for the Mannlichen lift system just below the village. It is well signposted at a small roundabout approaching Grindelwald. Once parked you can then walk, bus or train the half mile to the village proper.

Reached by motorhome (Grindelwald Grund), car, bus, train and cycle track from Interlaken.

Grindelwald /First (13)

High level plateau gained by gondola from Grindelwald. Starting point for many superb walks back down to Grindelwald or others of a more serious kind. At week-ends this is a mecca for paragliders as a take-off point.

From Grindelwald Dorf station walk through the village until you see the First lift station sign on your left in approx half a mile.



Grosse Scheidegg (14)

Another high level mountain pass above Grindelwald gained by foot from the top of the Grindelwald / First gondola lift. Starting point for many classic walks, back down to Grindelwald or elsewhere. You can bus or walk down from the pass.



Kleine Scheidegg (22)

High level pass linking Grindelwald and Wengen by train and the Mannlichen cable/gondola stations by foot. Offers lovely walks down to the villages and the best close-up views of the Eiger/Monch/Jungfrau. The 'Eiger Trail' walk across the barren base of the Eiger starts from just above here.

Pfingstegg (15)

Cable-car station coming up from Grindelwald and the start of the 'glacier walk' to the lower glacier and beyond. A short and spectacular walk this one, giving super views over Grindelwald, that leads you right up to the glacier. Both a bit more strenuous and safer than it appears.

The Pfingstegg base station is at the far end of the village and well signposted. From the top station turn right and follow the footpath, first among trees, then out and alongside the gorge. This fine path eventually leads to the Stieregg restaurant that is right alongside the glacier. Do not go further than the restaurant unless you really intend some serious stuff. There is no transport at the end of this one so it means a return trip - but well worth it. Approx 2.5 hours return. When you get back to the top station you can wind down on the toboggan run they have up here. Alternatively, turn left at the top station a walk to the Milchbach Restaurant and then the Wetterhorn Hotel for the bus down. Again good views over Grindelwald especially from the Milchback Restaurant.



Mannlichen (16)

Mountain top ridge connecting Grindelwald and Wengen by gondola and cable car. Superb view down into the Lauterbrunnen valley. Also fine walks towards the Kleine Scheidegg pass and the Eiger.

The bottom station is reached by road by turning right (signposted Grindalwald Grund) shortly before Grindelwald itself. Ample parking for motorhomes here at the train or lift stations.



Jungfraujoek (23)

Highest railway 'station' in Europe and the top excursion type attraction in the area. Quite an experience in the land of eternal ice and snow at this height. An observatory, restaurant, ice palace, husky's and the Aletsch glacier to look at and walk on. A one-off because of the cost. It's vital to choose the right day, weather wise - you don't want to get up there and not see anything. Take dark glasses, sun cream and warm clothing - you never know which you will need. Go early. Whole Day.

Train from Interlaken East to either Grindelwald or Lauterbrunnen (ask for timings at ticket office) to Kleine Schidegg. From their to Jungfraujoek.



Nearly all the above base stations are within 12 miles of Interlaken - then its usually upward!

Top Suggestions (Cramming it in on a Regional Pass - 'Free' Days Shown First)

- **Jungfraujoek** (Day)

- **Grindelwald Grund - Mannlichen - Kleine Scheidegg - Grindelwald - First - Grindelwald.** (Day)

Take the Mannlichen lift up from Grindelwald Grund and at the top look down over the Lauterbrunnen valley. Then walk across to Kleine Scheidegg (1.5 hours). A superb and easy walk all the time heading to the Jungfrau range with direct views to the Eiger north wall. From Kleine Scheidegg jump back on the train down to Grindelwald Dorf (don't get off at Grindelwald Grund). Walk about three quarters of the way through the village to the First (that's a name not a number!) gondola bottom station on your left. This lift is as gentle as they come all the way up the 6000 ft to the First plateau. Try to sit facing down the mountain and watch the valley opening up as you rise. When your eyes have stopped aching you can walk down by various routes to Grindelwald or jump back on the gondola to go down.

Alternately, take the gondola down to the 'Bort' mid-station where you can hire a bike-scooter and freewheel the rest of the way down. Great fun this.

If you dally too long in the restaurants, etc, and get behind schedule, you can always do the above trip in two sections on different days.

- **Grindelwald - First - Grosse Scheidegg - Hotel Wetterhorn - Grindelwald.** (Day)

Grindelwald again and up on the First gondola lift to the top. Look out for the 'Panorama' walk sign and follow this across to the Grosse Scheidegg pass. Another great walk, about 2 hours and slightly down hill overall. From the pass a bus takes you back down to Grindelwald, unless you want to walk?

However, get off at the Wetterhorn Hotel on the outskirts of the village (good refreshment stop) and take a look at the 'Blue Grotto'. Every ice cave, which is what the Blue Grotto is, ever built is blue to my knowledge. This one is slightly different however. A cafe has been built on a rock outcrop bang in front of the glacier and to draw the crowds the ice cave has been carved alongside. The only problem is that to get to it you have to climb 800+ ladder-like steps clinging to the rock - and for this torture they make a charge! If you are up to it the climb is something else. Well worth a look anyhow. Afterwards retreat back to the hotel and get the beers in. You now have only a short bus journey back to the village centre.

- **Guissbach Falls** (Half or Full day)

If you like boat trips they have a lovely old paddle steamer, the 'Lotschberg', that ply's this route on lake Brienz from Interlaken East station. Consult a timetable to see if you can fit it in. Time it so to have lunch at the Guissbach hotel at the falls. This would make for a relaxing whole day if you needed a break. You can also visit by train or car via Brienz, a woodcarving centre, or bike - see later.

- **Lauterbrunnen Valley and Trummelbach Falls** (Half Day).

- **Pfingstegg Glacier Walk** (Half Day).

Cycling

Interlaken

Cycling is safe around the Interlaken area with lots of cycling paths and off road routes.

One off-road route into town is from Neuhaus, through the wildlife area (walk this bit) and along the boat canal to the West boat station.

Another runs by following the road alongside Lazy Rancho up to the Beatenberg road. Then turn right and shortly turn off left picking up the path that runs alongside the base of the Harder mountain into the town.

Bonigen - on Lake Brienz (or walk).

Ride into the Unterseen area of Interlaken and join the Aare river promenade on the opposite side to the town. Proceed in the Interlaken East direction and cross over the river at the road bridge near Interlaken East Station. Go round the boat station to join the riverside path all the way to Bonigen boat station and lakeside promenade on Lake Brienz. The terrace of hotel 'Seehotel' overlooking the lake is good for a cuppa and watching the day.



Giessbach Falls.

A good route to the falls runs from Bonigen (above). From there follow the narrow and not much used road that runs around the lake to Iseltwald. From Iseltwald the road becomes a track all the way to the falls. Steep in a couple of places between Bonigen and Iseltwald. Approaching Giessbach stay on the level and follow the 'Hotel' signs. From the falls continue round the the lake and onto the flat road back via Brienz. Approx 28 miles return.



Cycling enthusiasts note that the above route is part of the Swiss National Routes 8 & 9.

Grindelwald & Lauterbrunnen

Ride through the town and on to Wilderswil railway station. Behind the station cross the river on the old covered bridge and turn right. This takes you, rising steeply at first, via the village of Gsteigwiler, to Zweilutschwand where it branches to either of the mountain villages above.

Grindelwald is the harder route and uses the road in places. Once at the village you can make it harder still by carrying on to make the ascent on the bus and cycle only road to the Grosse Scheidegg pass (6400 ft). And, if you're really mad, ride on to the First top station. Approx 14 miles to Grindelwald, 23 miles to Grosse Scheidegg and 27 miles to First. Watch out for brake fade coming back down from the pass as your rims will get red hot.

Lauterbrunnen is a much more gentle story. In fact it is probably the most enjoyable way to visit the main Waterfall, the Trummelbach Falls, and for exploring the valley itself by the traffic free right hand road along the valley. A fast downhill trip back by road? A really nice day out for the cyclist.



Further Out

Brienz approximately 10 miles by train, road or a pleasant lake steamer trip on Lake Brienz. A renowned wood carving centre and the base station for the Brienz Rothorn rack-railway ascent. Here you will also find the Ballenberg Open-Air Museum displaying some thirty traditional Swiss chalets and farms set in natural surroundings.

Thun approximately 13 miles by train, lakeside road, or steamer on Lake Thun. In the old days the lake journey between Thun and Neuhaus was the only way in and out of the Bernese Oberland. Thun has an interesting old quarter with double-decked shops, whereby you walk on the roofs of the shops below, along the 'Hauptgasse,' and a covered staircase leads to the church and castle.

Meiringen and the Richenbach Falls, of Sherlock Holmes fame, are only 20 miles away by road. There is a small museum dedicated to Colan Doyle and his hero Sherlock Holmes in the village with much memorabilia, including an interesting reproduction of 221b Baker Street.

Kandersteg approximately 26 miles by train or road. Probably best known today for the 9 miles long Lotschberg Tunnel. Excellent walking centre with 'Klus' and 'Lake Oeschinen' must do's.

Susten, Furka and Grimsel passes. For driving enthusiasts, the classic tour of the three passes starts on the doorstep in driving terms.

Swiss Road Tolls

Most, if not all, Swiss main roads are toll roads, and it is difficult and not really worth trying to plan an itinerary to avoid them. You will need to pay the toll charges before entering the country.

For vehicles up to and including 3500 GVW.

Applicable to Swiss first and second class roads, which includes motorways.

Proof of payment is by a 'vignette' (plastic windscreen sticker) which is stuck to the inside of your windscreen. The charge is a one-off payment of SF40.00 which is valid from the 1st December of the year previous to that shown on the vignette through to the 31 January following the year shown on the vignette.

Payment and receipt of the vignette are carried out by personnel as you drive through the Swiss border control. If you prefer you can buy the vignette from garages approaching the border or from the Swiss Tourist Board online. If you are towing a caravan you need to purchase a second vignette.

For vehicles over 3500 GVW - the vignette system does not apply.

This charge is not a toll but a general heavy vehicle tax and applies to all Swiss roads.

You will be asked to park up at the border control and take your V5 vehicle documents to the adjoining customs office. Here you fill in a simple declaration form (permit 15.91) stating how long the vehicle will be in Switzerland, used on the roads or not, and you will be charged on that basis. You will get a duplicate copy of the form back as a receipt. The charges (correct at June 2008) are

Per Day (subject to a minimum of SF 25.00)	SF 3.35
Per 10 Days	SF 32.50
Per Month	SF 58.50
Per Year	SF 650.00

If you are towing a trailer there is an extra charge, typically of SF 0.10 - per 100kg - per day.

The 10 day permit above allows you to freely choose your days of travel before entering Switzerland.

It is aimed at people making frequent visits, so as to avoid them keep having to report to the border customs office.

If you want to extend your visit over the stated time you take your duplicate copy to the nearest main post office and pay for a further period.

Unmanned Border Crossings. It is illegal to drive into Switzerland via an unmanned border crossing without a proof of payment (permit 15.91). Drivers arriving at such crossings are required to telephone the Swiss customs who will authorise their entry to proceed directly to a designated payment point, usually a post office.

A Few More From The Album



Grindelwald-First



'Lotschberg' on Lake Brienz



Pfingstegg to Milchbach Restaurant



Recommended Reading

The White Spider - Heinrich Harrer. The definitive book on the history of man versus the north face of the Eiger. Available in the town in English.

The Bernese Alps - Kev Reynolds. Cicerone Press (ISBN 1 85284 074 9). A guide to the classic walks in the area.

Across The Bernese Oberland - Mark Twain. A humorous and fascinating account of the authors 1878 wanderings in the area. Available in English from the small museum situated in the old square of Unterseen.

The above represents only a small amount of what is available in the region. Above all it is an outdoor paradise. Walk, climb, cycle, swim, sail, drink the wine, then spend your money going upwards if you want to. The only drawback I am aware of is the fact that a visit will spoil you for anywhere else!

I hope that the above has provided some food for thought for your visit. Comments, corrections and updates gratefully received.

Have Fun.

Ron Barnes (ron.barnes@ymail.com)

1/9/2008

Cover photo. View from the Pfingstegg cable-car base station

