

## A Report on Otter Aquatics' 2017 European Swimming Holidays

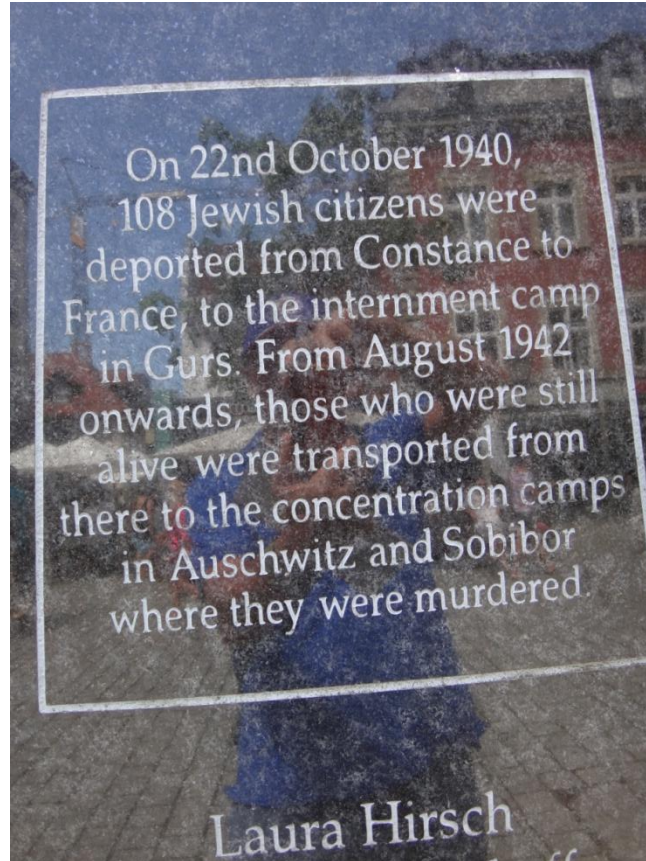
For the month of August 2017, a number of keen swimmers participated in three European swimming holidays: cycling and swimming around Lake Constance (Germany, Austria and Switzerland), swimming Slovenia's lakes and rivers and swimming in Italy's Lake Orta and nearby lakes.



Zürich's fast-flowing River Limmat – a real thrill

Before we arrived in our Lake Constance hub in the German city of Konstanz, two of us spent a couple of days in Zürich which was surprisingly good. We swam – or at least floated – in the very fast flowing Limmat River and Lake Zürich's beautiful swimming spots (*Schwimmbäds*). We then spent a couple of days in Konstanz experiencing the history of this ancient city, including a not-very-ancient museum of Konstanz's experience of Nazism. We also took a short train trip to the town of Singen and swam in a fantastic public pool made completely of stainless steel (why don't we do things like that in Australia?). Then, over the next few days, we cycled the 250 or so kilometres around Lake Constance (*Bodensee* in German) staying overnight in the towns of Immenstaad and Lindau in Germany, Bregenz in Austria and Arbon in Switzerland before returning to Konstanz. Along the way we visited the wonderful reconstruction of stone-age dwellings in Uhldingen, whiled away a few hours in the Zeppelin Museum in Friedrichshafen, missed out on our planned performance of Carmen in Bregenz's famous 7,000 seat lakeside stage (the weather had turned sour) and had an 'adventurous' next few days of battling snow and sleet (well, rain and cold at least) as we cycled back to Konstanz. This was the 'A' in adventure travel.

But we did manage a swim every day in the warm waters of the lake. Among the many highlights was the experience at our first overnight stop in Immenstaad where we stayed in the German equivalent of a country pub which was just great. There we were, two almost-teetotal Aussies, tired and sore-bummed from cycling, having a quite beer or two. I gather that our conversation got louder and louder by the litre and provided great entertainment for the locals.



Holocaust memorial in Konstanz



Stainless-steel pools in Singen



The washed-out *Seebühne* stage of Carmen in Bregenz



Battling the conditions on the Austrian/Swiss border

After Constance, we flew to the Slovenian capital of Ljubljana for the start of a week-long swimming 'boot camp' conducted by Strel Swimming Adventures. On our arrival at Ljubljana airport we were met by none other than the 'Big River Man', Martin Strel. What a buzz! We experienced long-ish swims: 2k in the mornings followed by another 2k in the afternoons with a 4k length of Lake Bohinj (after a 6k walk to the starting point!) on the last day. I was completely buggered on that swim and needed to be urged on by Peter for the second half of the long swim. It was a week of fabulous scenery – high, steep mountains, crystal clear water, sometimes cold, with a river swim over the border in Italy on one day.





Meeting the 'Big River Man', Martin Strel, in Slovenia



Lake Bohinj, Slovenia – we swam its full 4k length



Lake Bled, Slovenia – we swam this one too

After the Strel week, we spent a weekend in historic Ljubljana checking out this delightful city – ancient, clean, environmentally conscious. And this was the first example of quotable quotes of the trip: ‘A dead-set giveaway’, commented a complete stranger to us as we sat on the steps of Ljubljana town hall waiting for our tour guide, presumably aimed at one of our number wearing a Bunnings cap. Then we were off to Trieste (disappointingly shabby but historically interesting) and Venice which brought about the second of the quotable quotes: ‘Vena Sitaly’ shouted many of the thousands of American tourists into their mobile phones to explain to folks back home where they were calling from.



Ljubljana Town Hall steps: the Bunnings cap and the ‘what country are we in?’ navigator





Vena Sitaly

And then a train trip from Venice to Milan and onto Lake Orta. We swam from right outside the front door of our hotel 400 metres to *Isola San Giulio* and back, across Lake Orta one kilometre or so to the town of Pella (as in 2015, I got the landing point wrong and we had to mix it with two ferries), the two kilometre length of nearby Lake Mergozzo and other places, all the time experiencing this unique, beautiful and ancient location. And onto a third quotable quote: on one day, we had two swimmers and two walkers. The walkers' job was to go around the lake, find our landing place at a certain kiosk and wave the swimmers in. The swimmers never did see the walkers or their waving. So the by now worried swimmers came ashore and proceeded to carry out a search for the others imagining the worst: one (or two) collapsed walkers in need of first aid. I sent a text to one of the walkers 'Where are you' and the reply came 'At the kiosk'. 'Thanks very much', I responded, none the wiser about where they or the kiosk were. The walkers had decided to sit down at the kiosk and drink coffee instead of carrying out their assigned task. I got a rebuke for my outburst when we did eventually catch up. I still don't think I deserved their rebuke.





We swam to, from and around *Isola San Giulio* in Lake Orta with its 15<sup>th</sup> Century monastery



After the Lake Mergozzo swim – joined by daughter Alexandra and her bf Ben. He was suitably capped – but not the one promoting Bunnings



The piazza and old town hall right next to our 200 year old hotel in delightful Orta San Giulio

After Orta, we went our separate ways: Iain home to Capetown via Brussels, Noel home to Brisbane via Madrid, Peter home to Sydney via Bangkok and me home to Brisbane via Hanover, London and fantastic Hong Kong.

Join me in 2018!