

Climbing - May 2005, Sunneplattli Gersau, Switzerland.

Thursday 12th.



Lu and Wolfgang were on their way, they were crossing Lake Constance and would be in Zurich within a few hours and I still hadn't worked out what we were going to do. Oh feeding them and providing sleeping arrangements would be fine (although we would constantly experiment with Wolfgang's bedding). The problem was that I had promised that we would go climbing in the mountains and I was having trouble finding something realistic. A couple of weekends earlier I had led an unsuccessful plunge up into the mountains around Glarus, specifically I wanted to take Patrik and Jean-Marc to the Mettmenalp klettergarten. But at 1800 metres it was still covered in deep snow. We had resorted instead to hiking around the foothills with Leila and Eduardo. It was a nice day, but having girded myself for climbing I was left with the

distinct twinge of disappointment. I poured through my guidebook and interrogated each one of its 67 different climbing locations, filtering for altitude and climbing difficulty. It was amazing how few climbing places were to be found below a kilometre above sea level, I found only thirteen. Of those very few had enough easy climbs to make it worth the visit, however I did settle on one. Sunneplättli Gersau in Schwyz, it overlooked the Vierwaldstätter See (Lake of the Four Forest States) and on a nice day we would be able to see Mt Pilatus and the nearest of the great snow-capped alps. Now if only the weather would hold. On that score meteorologists were undecided.

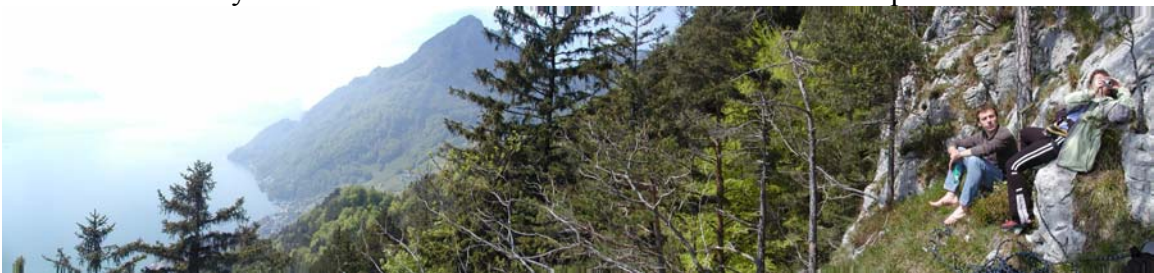
Friday The Thirteenth.

Breakfasted and organized the three of us stepped outside just as the first drops of rain started to fall. We packed the car and drove through town anyway, but the weather worsened and as we slipped out of Zurich through a tropical downpour our collective resolve crumbled. Plan B was to go to visit the bouldering hall in Adliswil, which was quite nearby at that point. We found it easily enough but it was locked. Of course, it's before ten in the morning on a workday. I called Connie, at that time bouldering with friends in France, and she said that we could expect the hall to open at about six in the evening. This was not good. We decided to just tour around Schwyz and hope for breaks in the weather so that Lu could see at least a tiny fraction of the alps. Talk about bad luck. It only took a miracle to change our fortunes and it must have transpired because I certainly wouldn't be writing much more than this. After we gassed the car at a station in Sihlbrugg the weather started to improve and as we circumnavigated the Zuger See the rain dried up completely. We had intermittent sun as we sped by Weggis and followed the banks of the Vierwaldstätter See. It was unbelievable. Lu had already seen the whole of Mt Pilatus and heard its legend, then the alps swept into view and silenced our growing enthusiasm for minutes at a stretch. We reached Gersau, navigated flawlessly onto the correct mountain road and switchbacked up its narrow way. The sun was

winning its struggle for high ground, burning the wisps of cloud above us to nothing. Wolfgang parked the car and we prepared for a short hike in high spirits. Of course we then hit a familiar snag and I got us lost. We walked blissfully past the tiny cairn that marks the climber-trail, possibly because it was on the left side and our eyes were held forcibly right by the awesome view of lakes and mountains. Anyway we ended up walking about a kilometre too far and dragging ourselves up a dangerously steep wash which fooled me into thinking that it absolutely had to be the right place. We supplimented that folly with being almost eaten by the world's dirtiest dog. On top of that I suddenly dashed off by myself up to cliffs high above the road we were retracing, sort of a random psychic decision, actually found some lonely belay anchors and then precisely nothing else along the two hundred metres of cliff I explored. After finally crashing back down the long fifty degree slope of forest and underbrush to the road I jogged tiredly back up to where Lu and Wolfgang were sitting waiting patiently for me to reappear. I gave up and suggested we get the hell out of here and try another place, ignoring an insistent voice in my head that was asking *and exactly what other place might that be?*



We found the little cairn on the way back to the car, would have missed it again but for Lu's sharp eyesight. Agh. Ok, so there it was and we quickly found the correct cliff. This place turned out to be less than five minutes stroll from where the car was parked. Double-agh with extra groan please. Somehow I was selected to do the first lead and I suited up under a 4b. Actually, apart from a little trickiness at the start it wasn't too bad. But it was my first proper outdoor lead in nearly a year and I was battling nervous exhaustion and so it was all a somehow trying. Regular gym-climbing might get your body used to the necessary movements involved, but it also gets you accustomed to having closely spaced bolts. This sets you up for a nasty shock when you get into the great widely-spaced outdoors. Once done I set up a toprope for the others and we had fun doing variations of the climb for a while. After this I suggested that maybe we could go up onto the ledge above where there was a good view and have lunch up there together. So we got organized and one after the other climbed up there. The sun was shining, the views were frankly unbeatable and we munched on nuts and fruits to pass a little time.



It was getting on a bit so we decided that a good move would be to go down to the lake, find a restaurant and have coffee or something. Which we did, enjoying ice-creams by the lake, not a bad day after all. We drove home via the Ibergeregg pass, where the views were just as spectacular.

