

My Alpcross challenge – 10 days cycling across the Alps from Bernhaupten to the Lago di Garda

25th July – 04th August 2016

It was not my idea. In fact I got talked into it... tried to refuse, but in the end I gave in. My best friend, Chrissi, has done two transalp tours before, and I always told her, that I do not want to do that. The thought of sitting on a bicycle saddle for numerous days in a row was just horror to me.

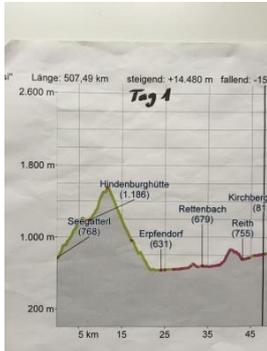
I used to mountain bike quite regularly when I lived in the Alps, but that was 13 years ago. I've been living in Nairobi, Kenya for 10 years. Not exactly mountain bike central here, which made preparation for the trip a lot harder. Due to security issues, I just did not feel comfortable cycling on the roads here.

Anyway, during my visit in Germany in February I spent a few hours with the "Radl-Sepp" - a specialized bicycle-shop - where I got measured from top to toe and the bike underneath me as well. The bike and me formed a perfect union, the perfect handle-bar was found and last but not least the perfect saddle for my bum was discovered – unfortunately a rather hard one.

Back in Kenya, with my new saddle, my old spinning bike had to do for most part of the training. At least to get my bottom used to the saddle. Otherwise I continued my normal training of HIIT, Pilates and cardio intervals on the treadmill. As a Personal Trainer I would say I have at least a solid base fitness. But a few people back home in Germany were very sceptical that I would make it.

Well, read with me about my journey!

Day 1: Bernhaupten (GER) to Kirchberg/Tirol (AUT) – 80km distance - 1500mAltitude

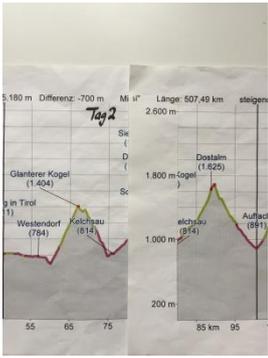


Chrissi and I were all ready to leave her house in Bernhaupten (near the Chiemsee), when the first raindrops started falling. Not exactly a good start to the tour. And we could see it was not going to stop anytime soon. So we got our rain gear out, changed and finally left: Yay! Here we go – 10 days of sweating and pushing and hopefully some fun. The first 30km were nice to warm up, just very soft hills, ever so slightly uphill. Once we reached Seegatterl, the official tour began and with that the first proper climb. By the way... It was still raining!!! My first real test and I was mentally very stressed. My motor skills in keeping the handlebar still on a rather steep uphill were non-existent. A few times I got very close to the edge, which stressed me even more. After a while I got the hang of it and felt more secure, but it was still very hard. The ground was quite soft and my front wheel lifted a few times. Once we reached the Hindenburghütte after 5km, halfway up the mountain, the sun came out and we had to change our outfits completely. Clothes were

hanging over benches to dry in the sun while we had a delicious lunch. But it was time to continue as we had another 6km or so uphill to the Straubinger Haus. It was even steeper and softer grounds so we had to push the bikes for a while, but the sun was shining. The view over the mountain massive 'Wilder Kaiser' was magnificent. From there we had a very long downhill. Down in the valley we were cycling through villages, along the river – nothing spectacular, but I could feel I was getting tired. All of a sudden, 15km before the end of this stage, a hill! NOOO! It was just not on my brain map and it hit me with a shock that I have to get up there. The road was tarmacked and nothing special, but I felt so tired and seemed to have no strength to get up there. Then I heard the voices of those friends in my head again who doubted I will make it and that crushed me even more. Close to tears I sat on a bench and felt sorry for myself. As I had to get up that hill one way or another I pulled myself together, though "Schnappi" (my grumpy self) was sitting on the handlebar, and paddled up that hill. Thankfully Chrissi knows me very well and realized that it is best to keep quiet. Just 15km from our final destination a massive thunderstorm hit us again and we got wet yet again as we couldn't change into our rain gear fast enough. At 6:30pm we finally reached our little hotel in Kirchberg and had a very cute room under the roof. Our daily routine of washing our outfits began and squeezing the water through towels out of them was tiring. For dinner we walked to a nearby restaurant and I struggled to get my food down, but knew I had to. The self-doubts were present and I was so worried to disappoint family, friends and myself. From that day on, I made sure to study our route for the next day in detail. No more surprises. I wanted to know, when and for how long whatever hit me.



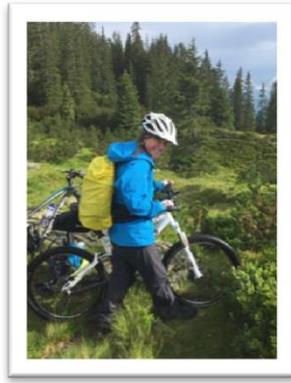
DAY 2: Kirchberg/Tirol (AUT) to Auffach (AUT) – 53km distance – 1670mAltitude



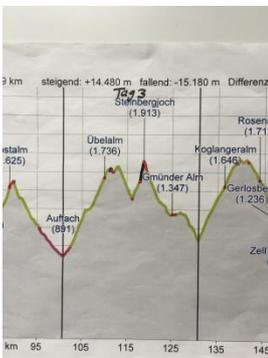
The night was rough, too warm under the roof and too many nightmares for me. During breakfast I struggled again to eat.

The sun was shining and we had the first 10km flat through the valley. Two hills today... the first one 7km uphill. I got tummy cramps just thinking about it. But then: surprise surprise – I did really well. The ground was either tarmac or higher up a very nice hard gravel. I found my rhythm and off I went. I felt so much better after that first hill up the Glanterer Kogel. My happy and positive self was back. 4km into our next hill we found a lovely little mountain restaurant and had another delicious lunch. On the dot at 2pm, when we wanted to continue, the heavens opened again. We had another 12km in front of us up the hill. We heard the thunder grumbling in the distance... The rain got worse and worse. At the Dostalalm it got so bad, that the residents offered us shelter, but we were so wet anyway and who knew when it would stop, so we continued. From there we had to carry our bikes on the back as it

was not even a proper trail anymore. A swamp had formed on the plateau at the top of the mountain. We had to balance on tufts of grass and rocks and tree trunks to get over it. Chrissi, who struggled anyway with the bike on her back, slipped off a plank and stood ankle-deep in the water-mud-cow poo-mix. So her mood took a tumble. Right at the top the sun came out again and knowing we only had to get down the hill, we both had a big smile in our face again. Auffach was tiny and we booked a nice hotel. Unfortunately we lowered the age level of that place hugely.



DAY 3: Auffach (AUT) to Stummerberg/Tannenalm (AUT) – 31km distance – 1475mAltitude



The night was much better. I was still nervous of what was coming, but I was now enjoying immensely the beautiful landscape. We started straight off with a 12km uphill journey. My tachometer did not work, which put me under stress again... After about 4km we took the battery out, put it back in – still no sign. I gave up and tried to get myself mentally prepared that I will not know how many more kilometres uphill I have to go. 2km further it all of a sudden jumped back to life. Yay! It saved my day.

The mountains surrounding us were so beautiful and we hardly saw another soul out there. Stunning. We took it easy up that long first hill, but made good progress. We were hoping to get lunch at the Übelalm, nearly at the top, but the cabin was not serving. After the Übelalm it got very steep and the ground made it impossible for us to cycle, so we pushed our bikes. All of a sudden we saw two horses and their foal running around a corner along on our trail. We were at about 1800mAltitude at that point. The little foal was

really curious and had a good sniff of our bikes. We continued over the ridge – still no cabin for lunch. I was hungry and “Schnappi” was slowly making its way up to the top of my backpack... At the next path fork we saw the sign for an open hut on our way – unfortunately we had to cycle uphill again. The sign said an hour to the cabin (for hikers), and my mood was not getting better. Still the sun said hello in between and the ride up was very picturesque. We had to cycle through a herd of beautiful cows with the bells around their neck. A sound I love so much and really miss in Africa. After only 35min we reached the little cabin and 3 other hikers were enjoying the sunshine on the hut’s veranda. On the menu was either bread with cheese or bread with cheese and speck – we opted for the latter and were not disappointed. The 3 different cheeses were handmade at the cabin and quite honestly one of the most delicious cheeses I ever had. Maybe it is also the good mountain air!

After lunch it was time to throw our bikes onto our backs again and carry them up over the ‘Steinbergjoch’. Not an easy climb, but the sunshine and surrounding compensated for the pain. At the top we struggled a bit finding the right path down. The cows were giving us funny looks, as we went back and forth and back again. Or maybe it was because of Chrissi’s very special walking style.... on her heels from grass to grass as the sole of her shoes had a hole through which water came in. Thanks to GPS we finally found the very narrow, tiny path and continued downwards. Another cabin and Chrissi felt like a coffee (which was not available at the Steinbergalm) so we stopped. When we came up the stairs to the veranda of the cabin a group of about six local men was sitting there and a hiking priest who spoke at least proper high German. Most men of the group fled back down to the valley or back into the stables. The priest continued uphill and we were left with two men, whose language we struggled to understand. We were offered Schnaps, which we refused, but got ignored. Down with it – yum – very nice Williams-Christ-Pear Schnaps. And olala, it went very quickly into our heads. The coffee came with two cups (I usually never drink coffee – just don’t like it) and

I didn't want to be rude. So I had a bit of coffee and a lot of very fresh milk with it. Man, it was the best coffee I ever tasted. We tried to follow the conversation as good as we could, but it was like another language. Anyway we had to continue down the hill and were told to be very careful as it is steep and not without caution. We even saw the signs for it later, but made it all the way down to Tannenalm in Stummerberg in one piece.

Luckily Chrissi managed that morning to get us a room at the Tannenalm. Our original accommodation would have been 2km further down the hill, which is long when you have to get back up in the morning. At the Tannenalm we had a friendly greeting and offered to use the sauna. What a treat for our muscles. It felt wonderful. Both my thighs had very crampy knots the size of tennis balls at the front. Our room was on the 4th floor (no elevator) which did not help. During dinner we were treated with a beautiful sunset and rainbow. This was my favourite day so far!



DAY 4: Stummerberg (AUT) to Breitlahnern (AUT) – 52km distance – 1465mAltitude

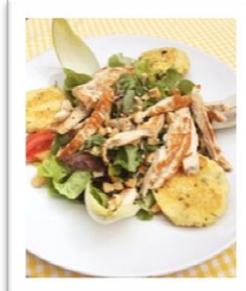


We left quite early this morning, as we had a long and not to be underestimated ride in front of us. Like the day before we had to cycle uphill from the start - 9km steady steep uphill. At the very top the view of the Zillertal below us was amazing - we were still above the clouds, but it opened up. Lunch was planned on the upper downhill part, but once we went around a smaller hill we were shocked by the amount of tourists. Welcome to the Zillertal-Arena! - a big ski resort with cable cars, that were taking all those tourists up the mountain. As that was just too much tohooabohoo for our taste we decided to go all the way down to Zell am Ziller in one go. Despite my jacket and long gloves the wind was freezing cold. The road was great though and it was a lot of fun to just let it roll. It reminded me of the old days when I used to go on the racing bike with my Dad at the age of 12/13/14.

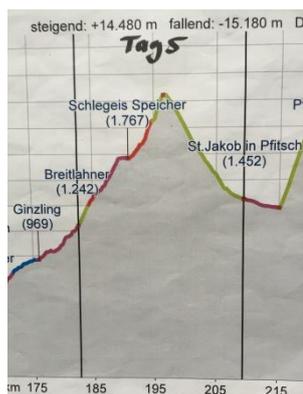
After we arrived in Zell we found a nice restaurant with a sunny veranda – the perfect place to warm up again. Their salad with chicken breast was really good and just what we

felt like eating. After lunch we cycled on a nice cycling path along the river, came across some paragliders and some rather big groups of 'fit over 70'-cyclists. In Mayrhofen we were looking for a sport shop to do something about Chrissi's leaking shoes. The town was beautiful and we were amazed by all the activities for the whole family that were offered. Finally we found a sport shop with a very helpful young man, who injected some hot glue into the holes of Chrissi's shoes.

Leaving Mayrhofen behind us we slowly had to rise again, for long stretches along the road and through tunnels. The over 15km steady uphill made me feel quite tired again. Chrissi kept saying, Breitlahnern must just be behind the next corner, but it wasn't..... very frustrating. On the last hill I was about to get off my bike and tell her to send me a car to pick me up. But that was not necessary, as the few houses of Breitlahnern were just behind it. I was exhausted! Our accommodation for the night was very basic, just a cute double bedroom with showers a floor down and toilets along the aisle. All clean though. For our shower we got a 4-min-token, which is not a long time. But even that we managed. After Schnitzel for dinner we sat in the TV-room and watched a German chick flick – perfect evening.



DAY 5: Breittlahner (AUT) to St. Jakob in Pfitsch (ITA) – 32km distance – 1037m Altitude

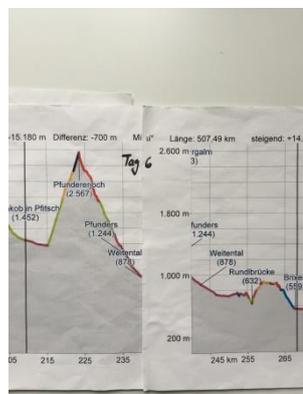


We woke up to blue sky and sunshine - finally beautiful summer weather. On the program for today we had one big hill. Leaving our accommodation on time we started the 7km climb to the Schlegeis dam. It was part trail through light forest, part forest road and for the final 4km along the road – with lots of traffic. The view of the dam wall with the blue sky above it was already breath taking from the distance. Arriving at the lake I immediately started taking pictures. Every single direction you looked at was stunning. Along the lake it was a flat surface for about two kilometres and we continued to stop to take more pictures. Behind the lake we could see the Schlegeis glacier – BEAUTIFUL! The path up to the `Pfitscherjoch´ was for most parts not cycle-able. Also the stepping-stone-path was crowded with hikers from both directions. Right at the beginning Chrissi wanted to drive through a little stream that crossed our path. Unfortunately a rock blocked her front wheel and she fell to the side into the river. No damage done, except wet pants. It looked rather funny though. As it was such a beautiful warm day, there were no

complaints and we continued pushing our bikes up the hill. It was a trail from one picturesque waterfall to the next. For some parts we even had to carry our bikes on our back again, which proved to be quite tricky with oncoming traffic. A lot of people were asking us about our tour and we received a lot of admiration. At the top of the `Pfitscherjoch´ we crossed the border to Italy and had our lunch already on Italian ground. The way down was a very well prepared gravel road and we arrived in St. Jakob at a good time, but couldn't find our hotel. We were about to give up and look for a new place when somebody told us: that the hotel is another 5km further down the road. It was on our track for the next day, so no problem. The hotel was very nice with indoor swimming pool and sauna and steam bath. Perfect afternoon wellness! For dinner we enjoyed the lovely salad bar, followed by fresh trout – YUM YUM! It was a perfect day!



DAY 6: St. Jakob (ITA) to Brixen (ITA) – 58km distance – 1768m Altitude



This stage is what we would call in German the "Königsetappe" or "royal stage". What we didn't know yet when we got on our bikes on this sunny morning was, how much we would push our bikes. Of the total 9km climb up the `Pfundererjoch´ we only cycled 1km from the bottom part. It then became so steep and soft and rocky that we preferred to push. We had to cross several riverbeds – barefoot through ice cold water - which was fun and a welcome change to the monotonous uphill pushing. Once we were out of the tree line we had at least a view.

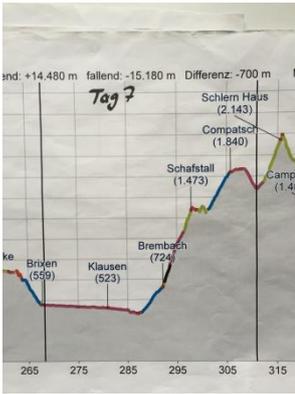
A young and obviously extremely fit young man cycled past us, stopped without getting off the bike to take a picture and continued on. Both Chrissi's and my jaw dropped. Wow! Despite the beauty of the landscape, my little `Schnappi´ was saying `hello´ slowly. My mood was not too great and I was extremely bored of the pushing the bike. It also didn't make sense to me, why we had to cross a hill, that we were obviously not able to cycle. If I want to go hiking I do that without a bike. But what to do? Swallow your grumpiness and

continue. We had to push the bikes through a cow herd, which was standing on the path. A rather nervous moment. Those cows are really big when you have to push them gently out of the way. About 2/3rds up the mountain we were able to cycle again on and off. Even further up, we were surrounded by lots of marmots - really cute and very relaxed with us walking past. After that we entered "moon landscape" – just gravel and soil, from time to time a tiny flower. It was also getting colder. We were overtaken by 2 men, that stayed in the same hotel as us the night before and another group of 3 men, that were already in their 50s, but obviously still very fit. We had a little chit chat with them which lightened the mood. Finally the last 100m to the ridge... I could feel a lump forming in my throat. The emotions

of this strenuous Bike-Hike were taking over. We were about to cross the highest point of our total tour at 2564m above sea level. I let out a scream of relief and happiness at the very top that must have been heard in Kenya as well. Tears were so close to the brim, but I didn't want to cry in front of all those men. Words can't quite describe how happy and proud I felt on top of the `Pfundererjoch`. The wind was howling and so cold. We couldn't put our jackets on fast enough. A few more pictures and down we went again. I would have loved to cycle it down, but it was just too dangerous at the top part. Frustration and `Schappi` came up again, as the pushing downhill was even worse. It was a mix of cycling and pushing and carrying and my heels were extremely sore by then. I suffered from bad plantar fasciitis for 1,5 years and only got rid of it earlier this year. So I worried that I ruined all my progress with this (excuse my language) stupid hill. By then `Schnappi` was red with rage. Once on a flatter and cycle-able path we reached a lovely little hut for lunch. We met our cycling fellows from the summit and shared a table and some funny stories with them. As usual, the mood improved quickly again. Then a father with son arrived at the cabin and was asking our table neighbours, if we (Chrissi and I) are their pick-up service. Hello????? What a stupid Macho-comment. Chris was really offended by it and let him know, that we came over the `Pfundererjoch` as well and did not come up here by car. The way down was stunning. It was getting warmer again, we saw some goats on a very high up cliff above us and stunningly beautiful landscape. Once we reached the tarmac road there was a sign congratulating all the "Alpcrossers" – so us as well. Great feeling. The tarmac downhill was highly enjoyable and I reached speeds of up to 60km/h. Woohoo! It was getting so warm that despite the airflow it felt like driving through an oven. When we reached the valley we continued towards Brixen along a river and the highway. It looked a lot more Italian now. I have never seen so many apple plantations in my life. Just 13km before Brixen we had another 5km long hill to climb. Parts of the hill were in little up and downs through a pine forest. It reminded me a lot of my childhood. Still shortly afterwards tiredness took over and I just wanted to get to the hotel. Therefore `Schanppi` made a quick appearance again. Once we made it up this hill as well, it was just downhill on tarmac into Brixen. Chrissi had booked us a 5*****star hotel "Goldener Adler" in the centre of town, which we found immediately. The historic building was beautifully renovated and our room was very specious. We had a bath tub which I could not resist using. Oh, that was nice! My lovely friend was so sweet that she washed my clothes as well while I had my bath – I am forever grateful. When Chrissi asked what I want to do before dinner we just looked at each other and both said SHOPPING! I had a small glitzy top with me that would do for a nice occasion, but Chrissi wanted to get something a bit more chic as well. It was pretty hot and humid outside. Brixen is a beautiful city with a very beautiful historic city centre. We found something for Chrissi pretty quickly and decided to have an ice cream in front of the Dome. Back to the hotel for a glass of bubbly in the bar. For seven o'clock we walked to our gourmet restaurant "Finsterwirt" across the town square. We sat outside in a backyard on a gallery surrounded by vines. The 4-course menu was out of this world including the wine and the service. I made a promise to myself, to come back here with my husband on another occasion. As we didn't quite feel like going to bed yet, we moved one storey down in to the Vinothek and had another wine and a cheese platter that was equally as good as the dinner before. In the distance we could hear some thunder already and not long after we had the lightning as well. We paid and made our way back to the hotel, just before it started to rain heavily. We struggled to fall asleep due to heat and the thunderstorm outside, but eventually fell into a restful sleep.



DAY 7: Brixen (ITA) to Seiser Alm (ITA) – 42km distance and 1700mAltitude

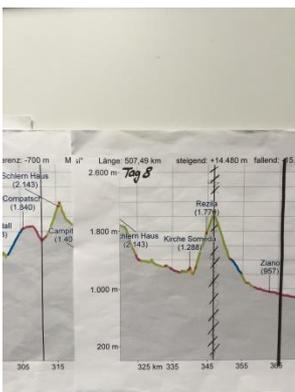


When we first looked out, the weather looked still friendly and fine. We enjoyed a delicious breakfast buffet to the fullest. By 8.30am we were sitting in the saddle again on our way to the Seiser Alm in the Dolomites. We had only cycled for 3km when it started raining heavily again. Hadn't we had enough of that weather? It was like standing under a shower. My rain jacket gave up protection mode and the water was running down my skin on the inside into my (up to then) dry trousers. I was soaked and shivering. Already in the morning I had a funny feeling about this stage and the weather forecast was not looking great for the whole day. After 20km we reached a last little town before the 20km steep climb. I mentioned to Chrissi already before that I am completely wet and didn't feel comfortable (if that is the right word to use) to continue. My first request was sort of ignored, but I knew I had to make a move now or just suck it up and continue. With a heavy heart I decided that with my material issues it would be better to stop here. Chrissi wanted to continue so we separated and I drove to the train station from where a

bus would leave to take me uphill. I stood in that tiny hut at the bus stop – dripping and shivering. Quickly I changed into my primaloft jacket and was at least dry on the top part. My rain overshoes ripped and I had to fix them meagrely. After figuring out which bus to take I studied the timetable and was happy to see that I only had to wait 30min. The time passed, but no bus. I looked again and realized that it was Sunday and the next bus would only come in 3 hours. A perfect time for unwelcome thoughts to creep up, feeling like a loser and doubting, if it was the right decision to stop here. So I called my Dad in Germany with tears in my eyes, but he very much approved my decision, which made me feel better. The news of my situation spread quickly amongst my family and I had a call from my Mum as well as my husband, who spent the weekend in Stockholm. While on the phone with him, I had the idea to call myself a taxi. But no number for a taxi company anywhere to see in the bus hut and I did not want to get wet again or better said more wet than I already was. So Tim googled for me and found a number for a taxi in that area. Luckily they still speak German in that part of Italy and a very friendly lady turned up 20 minutes later with a small bus to take me and my bike to the Hotel Saltria. Apparently a special permission is required for taxis to drive all the way up to the Alm. So we had to ask at a check point, if we were allowed to proceed. In the hut I left my wallet in the bathroom, which of course I only realized when I wanted to pay the taxi at the hotel. Well done, Karina! It was really not my day. Thank goodness I still had some cash in a separate pocket of my backpack and the receptionist phoned the checkpoint... My wallet was found and returned later that afternoon. As the weather outside was still miserable I decided to do a session of High Intensity Training for my neglected abs in the hotel room to make up for the unfinished stage and to fight my guilty conscience. That felt better! Shortly after I received a text from Chrissi, that she had called herself a taxi as well further up the mountain. We spent a lovely and relaxing afternoon in the wellness area of the hotel. Bliss! Dinner was very nice, but the restaurant was full of small children and babies. We left after the main course and decided to take some cheese and fruits with us to the hotel room and watch a movie.



DAY 8: Saltria – Seiser Alm (ITA) via Passo di Lusia to Cavalese (ITA) – 68km distance – 1800mAltitude

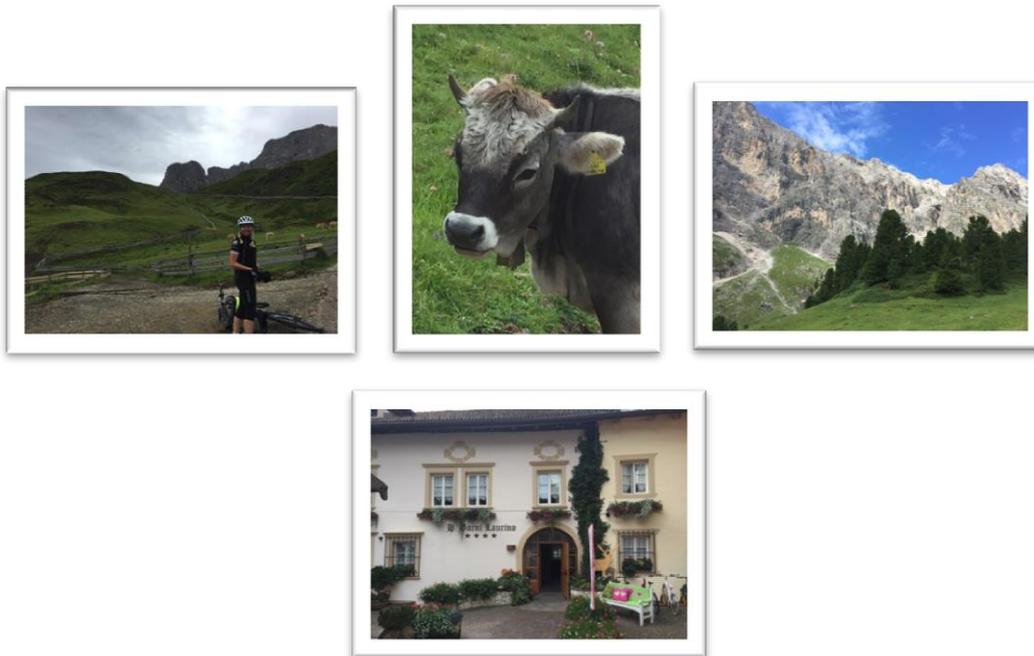


Rain or no rain today??? It was unbelievable – we were jinxed! As soon as we were about to drive out the garage it started raining. We did not deserve that. To top it all, Chrissi's Garmin refused to work today as well. It only showed us little dots on the way, but not the route. Very frustrating, more so for Chrissi. She did a fantastic job navigating us through the day.

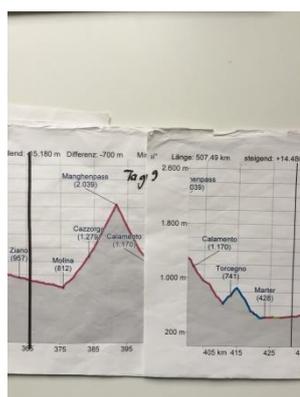
So off we went in our rain gear starting at 1400m above sea level. It went directly uphill for about 5km having to cover about 650m Altitude. We were both huffing and puffing and I first thought I am coming down with a cold. But as we both were very short of breath it must have been the altitude. We took our rain clothes off halfway up to the 'Schlern Haus' only to put them 100m further directly back on. It was frustrating. But we got up to the top of the hill and the sun came carefully through the clouds. How wonderful. On the down path we came across some really beautiful cows. We called them the Cleopatra cows, as their eyes look very Egyptian. We also saw some rather hairy highland cows.

By now the sun was fully out, but the path was still wet, so that the dirt sprayed us badly. What do we learn from that? Keep your mouth closed when going downhill!

Arriving at the first town, we were again a bit overwhelmed with all the tourists. As so often we cycled along a river on a nice path from town to town until Moena. Despite our navigation problems, Chrissi managed to find us a path so we did not have to go all the way down into Moena, but could start our 7km uphill journey a bit more directly. I was really nervous about the ride up to the Passo di Lusia as it looked so steep on paper. In the end we had a good underground and quite a nice experience. Almost at the top, we decided not to stay for the night at the cabin at the Passo di Lusia, but to continue down into the valley and find a hotel there. The views from the Pass were magnificent, we were quite early and for the next day we had 85km to cycle. We got our maps out and studied the GPS to find a bigger town and decided on Cavalese. Thanks to Chrissi's black AMEX-card we called their special service from the top of the mountain and asked them to find us a hotel. Our room at the cabin we gave to a young Austrian couple who were happy for the accommodation. We continued downhill to Cavalese. Unfortunately the town is built on a rock, while our cycling path was in the valley.... Amex called back that moment and confirmed they found a little hotel for us. So we cycled up the hill again. Even though it was not planned and I was not in the mood for it, my legs were doing really well. Once we reached the hotel we were in for a surprise. A good one. The Hotel Laurino is just the cutest little hotel I have ever seen. Very chalet-chic with lots of attention to detail – in a nice way. We had a beautiful quiet room with a little stream close by. For dinner we walked into the centre of town and found a lovely place with good food and good wine. On the way back there was live-music and we both had some very dark chocolate ice cream. Delicious!

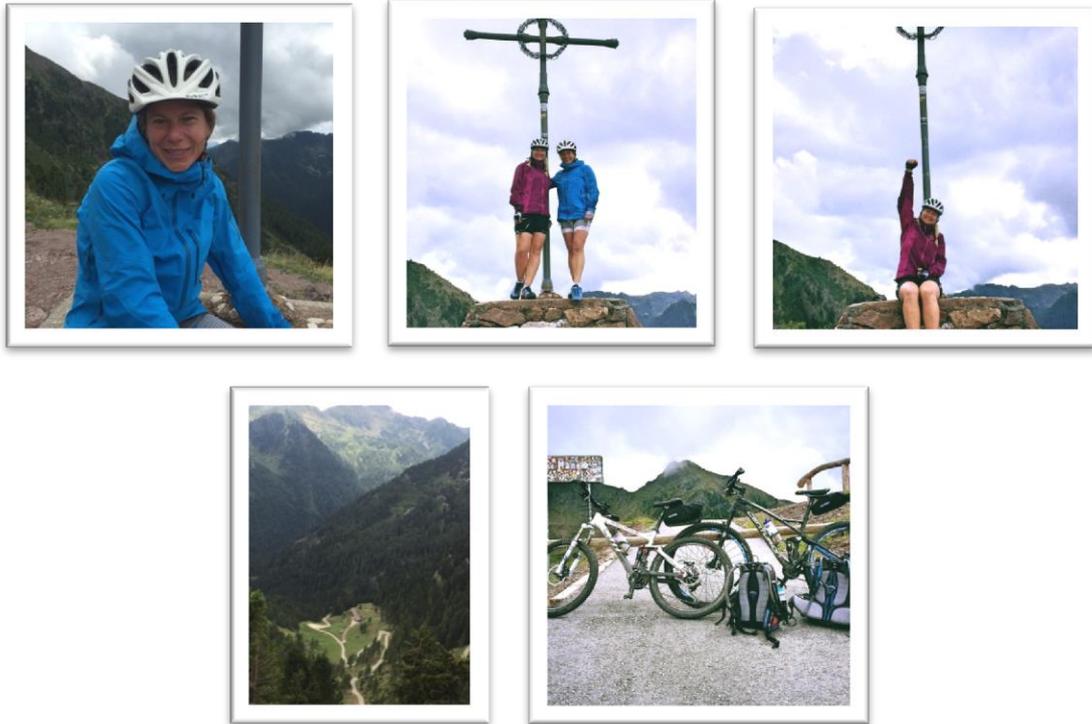


DAY9: Cavalese (ITA) to Levico Terme (ITA) – 68km distance – 1685mAltitude



Juhu!!! The sun was shining and we had our last big Pass to conquer, the Manghenpass. 18km steady uphill at an average slope of 10%, all on tarmac. It didn't sound all so bad and I really wanted to perform well on that last big hill. I found my rhythm and felt really good and positive. We stopped every 3km to give our bottoms a rest. That was the part of my body who was suffering the most. Sore, sore, sore! We were overtaken by some professional Italian Cross country skiers on ski rollers – at least we had a very sexy view at their backsides. What an uplift! The road seemed to go endlessly through forest, only 3km before the summit it cleared and we had beautiful cows around us again with their bell concert. A concert of a different kind Chrissi had to deal with. Her breaks were making an awful noise uphill and in the serpentes I could hear her below me. La Traviata! The last 1,5km I just imagined people on the side cheering for me – that was a boost. And nearly at the top, where people got out of their cars, they were cheering with admiration for our achievement. A lot of professional racing cyclists seem to use the

Manghenpass from the other side for their training. Once we were on our way down again, I was extremely grateful, we didn't come up that way. At times 16% slope and 26km!!! I enjoyed the speed until a cow was standing on the road. I am not sure who got more of a fright – the cow or me. The racing cyclist overtook us again in the new 'Froome-style', zooming past. And I thought I was fast with 60km/h. And then another hill upwards, which was torture for my bum, but otherwise ok. The rest of the trip we continued on flat surface along lots of apple plantations. Close to our final destination for the day we knew we had to deal with Chrissi's breaks. In Levico we found a Bicycle shop. The owner did not speak English, German or French, but identified the problem quickly and fixed it. Not many words were wasted (very unusual for an Italian) and we continued into town for an ice cream! Our original accommodation, a village further, did not pick up the phone, so we decided to stay in Levico. Dinner was solala, but there was a live-orchestra playing at the town square and we listened for a while longer before going to bed.



DAY 10: Levico Terme (ITA) – Riva del Garda (ITA) – 85km distance – 642m Altitude



Day 10 – our final stage had finally arrived! And the sun was shining!!! But even though the profile did not look challenging and we had less than half the altitude to cover then in previous stages, I was nervous. The long flat bit just drags on for a long time and is known for a lot of oncoming wind. My bum was in a bad shape, but nothing would stop me to make it to the end today. Chrissi was kindly asking if I would need a taxi again.... No way!

The first and only real hill for the day looked rather small, but actually felt much longer and harder. I guess our bodies were just tired by now. On the downhill to Trento we just enjoyed the plantations of all sorts of fruits. The city itself was quite pretty and we decided to stop for a coffee or in my case a proper dark and thick hot chocolate. I hadn't had one of those since my days living in Monaco. What a treat. From Trento it was just killing kilometres. We were lucky

with the wind, which picked up only after lunch when we were just about 30km away from our final destination. The slope increased very slightly and we ran into a group of 8 or so men from Austria, which sort of stayed around us until the final climb. One more hill separated us from the Lago di Garda. How bad would it get I wondered? But while I was wondering I was already on the top. It was really nothing. The moment we saw the lake the first time I had tears in my eyes. We had made it and all the sweat and pain was so worth it. Huge pressure fell off me and if somebody would have given me a glass of bubbly and would have drunk it.

At the lake in Torbole we ran into our Austrian Cyclists again and they invited us for a drink after we christened our bikes in the lake – apparently it is tradition. They were seriously impressed by our achievement. On the way to Riva we had a short stop at Mecki's – a local and for cyclists famous shop and café. I had to buy some T-shirts for my kids.

Cycling along the promenade to Riva felt like the Côte d'Azur. It is a very Mediterranean flair at the Lago di Garda. We decided not to go to the hotel, but to cycle directly into town. It was coffee time and time to shop for something a bit more glamorous for the night. We both could not see, leave alone wear, our black hiking trousers anymore. We found shorts for both of us and Chrissi found me a beautiful royal blue cocktail dress, which I had to have. Very happy we finally cycled, with shopping bags on the handle bar, to our 5*****star hotel. The Du Lac et Du Parc - very modern with lovely rooms. We dressed up and walked back into town for dinner at a cute fish restaurant we reserved in advance.



The DAY AFTER: Riva del Garda (ITA) to Bernhaupten (GER) – retour by bus

Not that we could sleep in today, but the bus that would take us back to Germany was only going to pick us up by 9.30am. We were having a relaxed breakfast – again in our cycling outfits – as we still planned to get out of the bus at the Brenner pass and cycle downhill to Innsbruck (AUT).

Enjoying the warm weather, we were waiting in front of the hotel. Chrissi was cleaning her bike at the hotel's beautiful water feature. We got a few funny looks from pedestrians.

Finally the bus came and the bikes were securely stored in the back. A father and his 14 year old son, who did a 5-day cross, were already on board. We had to pick up two more passengers in town. And look who was waiting there? Our two cyclists, who we met at the `Pfundererjoch` a few days before. We had a very relaxed and funny bus ride. At a little pitstop we were then convinced to stay in the bus until Germany. As the bus was going to Rosenheim anyway (just an hour from Bernhaupten) we thought it would make sense. We were both looking forward to seeing our husbands and children and knew we would be a lot faster this way.

In Rosenheim we bought our train tickets and had to wait another 45min for the next train. From the train station in Bergen it was only a very short 1,5km ride to the house. I was so excited. But first we had to get up a little hill to Bernhaupten. Who would have thought I would say it: `I was happy to sit in the saddle again` even though my bum was still extremely sore.

The last evening in Riva I promised Chrissi, that I will do another Alpcross with her. Maybe not next year and maybe not for 10 days again, but I would do it again! And maybe I'll leave `Schnappi` at home then.

I am immensely grateful, that I was able to do this trip and even more so to have finished it. Thank you, Chrissi, for planning it all and navigating and for still being my best friend. It was not our last adventure.

