

[vc_row][vc_column][vc_column_text]By Dan Friesen on May 25, 2016

Today, we hiked the Engadin Valley of eastern Switzerland. This is the small area of this Alpine country that speaks Romansch, the fourth official language of Switzerland along with German, French, and Italian.



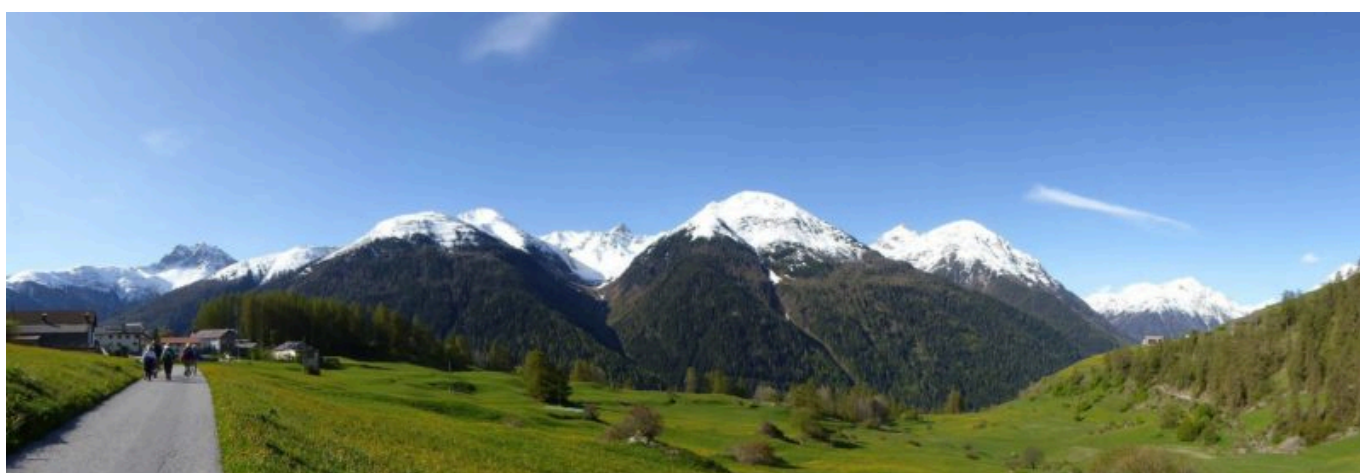
Group photo next to our hotel in Guarda, Switzerland

The hike was awesome! I had to cull through my nearly 300 photos twice to filter the number down to a count that had at least a chance of not boring you all to tears.



The beginning of sensory overload

Along the way, however, I had another first. After 25 years of leading tours in different parts of the globe, today I had the opportunity to roundup renegade cattle...on foot. The story goes like this...



We were only about 3 km into the walk and I sensed that we were getting spread out a bit. Our trail was running laterally along the wall of Engadin Valley, starting from our base in an uber-charming family inn in the tiny town (under 200) of Guarda. The day was perfect! The panoramas were jaw-dropping. Already we were suffering from that adrenaline buzz stemming from scenery overload (or was it the 5000+ feet of altitude?).



At a couple of places early in the trail, we crossed through cow pastures. Electric fences bordered the paddocks and a strand of the wire served as the gate. Hikers are responsible to “close” the gate by hooking the wire back up after passing through.



Sheep dotting the hillside

The plan was for Jim, our sweep, to close the gate when everyone was through. At this altitude, however, the group got pretty strung out. Something told me to leave Hildrun, our guide, to manage the trail (she was the one who planned it) and go back to see how far spread out we really were.



King of the Hill

Good thing I did. I came around a bend and found Isabel, one of our walkers, having an argument with a Swiss brown cow, more than one, in fact. Because of the gap in our group, a family herd of about 10 cows conspired to escape by following Isabel through the gate. About 10 more of our walkers were a few hundred meters behind her. Isabel has Swiss roots and was loudly admonishing the cows in Swiss-German to return whence they came.



They weren't having any of it! They kept coming, large on the hoof. As I grabbed for a stick, I was envisioning a difficult explanation to the farmer about why we didn't close the electric gate and in which part of the valley his cows might now be on the run.



The creatively named Steinburg (stone fortress)

These guys were determined and were responding to Isabel's scoldings by crashing off the trail in the bushes. I decided I needed more enforcers and grabbed a second stick, running back and forth with Isabel in front of the group, shouting and prodding with the stick to turn them back.



Decorative doorway in the village of Ardez - our midpoint rest break

The false bravado fooled them. The lead cow looked like she could easily have gored me with her stylish set of horns, then flung me like a rag through the forest. But persistence won the day and after a few passes into the bush to coral stragglers, we funneled them back through the opening and pulled the electric gate shut!



Having notched another new guide role for my resume, we continued what is one of the most stunning walks I have ever done! I certainly hope to return to the Engadin Valley with Hildrun and another group of walkers. Next time, however, we'll be more careful to keep the gate closed!

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