

“The Multilingual, open minded hiking trek“

Kiwis are flightless birds, but this kiwi (otherwise known as a New Zealander) loves to fly and travel. That is how I arrived in Switzerland, meeting the love of my life and falling in love with this country.

Hiking to explore the landscape is a passion of mine and Ruedi asked me if I would like to help with a Procap weekend for handicapped people in Valais. After seeing the glaciers in Chamonix (France) and New Zealand and being amazed by their scale and beauty, I believe that this opportunity should be available for everyone, while we are still lucky enough to see them.

Ruedi and I journeyed by bus and train to Mörel to meet Martin (our guide) and the team. There were four custom designed wheelchairs to cater for our three guests and their equipment. The team of volunteers were of all ages and it was clear that there was a good spirit and energy present.

The gondola took us up to Riederalp and we began our hike up to Villa Cassel, stopping for a picnic lunch on the way. It became clear that we were a multilingual group, speaking Swiss German, German, French and English and from different countries also. I was pleasantly surprised at how many people spoke English which is my mother tongue. Even one of our handicapped guests was Canadian and she was very interested to know I was from New Zealand. There were instant connections made and friendships formed from the common interest.

A minimum of four people to each wheelchair helped to push and pull the guests in the wheelchairs up to Villa Cassel.

An English, tudor style building built in 1902 by Sir Cassel, Villa Cassel was bought and renovated by Pro Natura Aletsch, Switzerland’s conservation organisation in 1976. It is now a hotel, museum and conservation center for the region with its unique flora and fauna.

This was to be our base for the night and with ample availability of 65 beds and our rooms on the third floor, it felt like being in a castle. Our less able-bodied guests had accommodation in a nearby chalet with easier access.

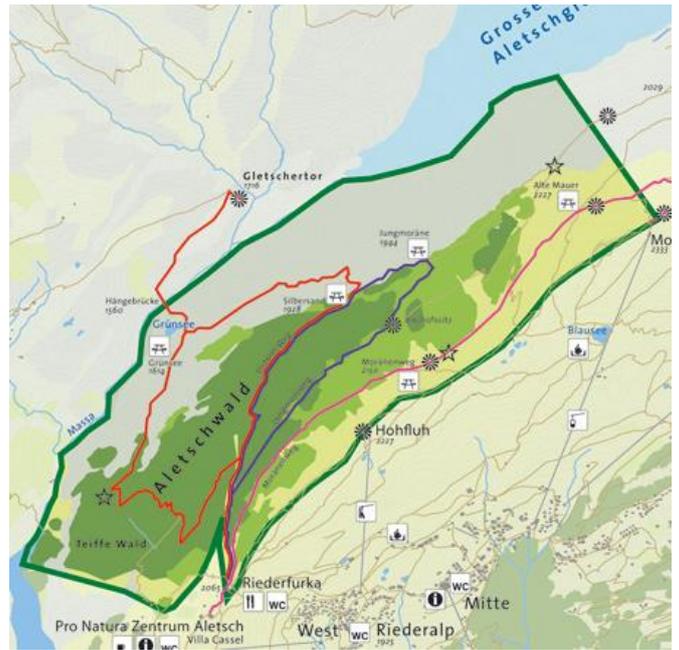


With the weather on our side, we made a gentle round trip hike in the afternoon exploring Riederhorn.

There was free time before group dinner and everyone looked forward to the menu of fresh corn salad, Bratwurst, rattatouille and apricot creme dessert. At 2065m, the hotel is known for its biological cuisine and even

the chef had a special character. However the food was less of a highlight for me personally and I was keen to take a walk after dinner in the evening light.

The next morning after a buffet breakfast, we were accompanied by an Aletsch guide to do a loop walk to see the Aletsch Glacier. We had several stops along the way, with our guide informing us about the forest trees; Arve, Fichte and Larche and how they grow in this region. This unique forest is only found in a few areas of Switzerland and it was interesting to hear about the adaptations to the region. We saw Gemschi, Hirsch and Tannenhäher on route and learnt how they interact with the Aletsch forest.



The fog lifted enough for us to see the curving line of part of the glacier. Teamwork and strength of spirit saw us reach the top at Hohfluh (2227m) and the weather became clearer, showing the beauty of the glacier with the 'highway lines'. Somehow the energy of the place, re-energised us and there was a lot of talking and laughter on the trek back down to Villa Cassel.



„Hausgemachter Kuchen“ was too inviting to resist, and we enjoyed refreshments on the deck before catching the gondola down to Mörel.

The weekend was a wonderful event and it was evident that everyone enjoyed the experience.

The genuine smiles and loud applause of appreciation to our guide were testament to this.

Friendships formed and memories made, will strengthen the core of an already great cause.

Thank you for the opportunity for this kiwi to take flight with Procap.

I like to think that I helped to give wings to three handicapped guests so that they could also take flight.

.... Till next time!

Lieber Grüsse, Clare