

Roadbook „Pelican-Chapter goes Sicily“ or “Michele at home”

Sunday, June 13, 2010 - From cold rain to sunshine

Coming from different previous events we all met at the station Bellinzona Nord. Erika, Hansjörg, Silvia and Peter previously attended the 4-Star Mountain Weekend in Arosa organized by the MC Razorbacks. Berta, Michele, Toni, Kurt, Margrit, MoMo and Frank stopped on the way to Bellinzona in Ibach, where Marsha and Andy, two of our chapter-friends organized a joint Mercedes-Harley Davidson exhibition; we could not decide whether to choose the new Mercedes SLS or a Road Glide Screaming Eagle. Paul went directly to Bellinzona and despite his reputation for being late – unfounded according to himself and as we all also discovered later – he was very early at the meeting point. North of the Alps all groups encountered slight to heavy rain but as soon as we entered the Ticino, we had sunshine, which has been a good sign for the whole trip.

The route took us further south, headed by our director Hansjörg, along the curvy roads of Lago Maggiore to the hotel Paradiso in Ghiffa, a true paradise, with very friendly owners where one really feels at home. After arrival, we had baked Zucchini flowers as appetizers with our beer and I am not going to spoil you with the excellent dinner, whose main course was Piccata Milanese. Best of all was Berta's (Spanish/Italian/German) and Paul's (English only, although he does understand some German words) conversation about Zucchini flowers and nipples; we all laughed a lot.

Monday, June 14 2010 - Windy winding road

After a great breakfast buffet at Paradiso, we headed south following the shoreline of Lago Maggiore and then onto the highway towards Genoa. It was quite windy on the highway and towards the end, the road became also curvy.

At the exit of the highway all toll cards worked except Frank's. His card was “non leggibile” and as he did not understand the Italian from the loud speaker he got quite angry. He had to walk over to another booth and pay in cash. We arrived early for boarding in Genoa and parked at the Aquarium until we could board the ferry. Thanks to Michele's Italian we did not get a fine as apparently, we were not allowed to park on a car parking spot with the Harleys; we however did pay for every single bike! In one of the bumps in Genoa, Hansjörg lost a glass of his winker, which has luckily been the only “incident” on the whole trip. We all watched the departure at 10 pm after dinner (and Italy only playing 1:1 against Paraguay) and then went to bed in our cabins. The sea has been quite calm and the journey relaxing even for those who had to take medication against getting sea-sick.

Tuesday, June 15 2010 - Sicilian driving in Palermo

After a long day on the ferry with wind and rain as are coming closer to Sicily, we arrived at 6:30 in the evening in Palermo and got off the ferry. We filled up the bikes with gas at a gas station close to the harbor and then entered the chaotic traffic in Palermo. As traffic was not enough a burden, it also started to rain a little bit and the roads had become quite slippery. With 10 bikes we had no chance to pass through together and did get separated. Luckily we synchronized our three navigation systems beforehand and managed to navigate everybody in smaller groups safely through Palermo with direction to Sciacca.

Paul, who has not been used to Italian/Sicilian driving lost his nerves on fears about himself and his bike, but could restore his batteries at the marvelous dinner in our hotel upon arrival at night in Sciacca. According to rumors, another reason for his quick recuperation might have also been the birthday party of an 18-year old young woman at the hotel with lots of her friends attending!

Wednesday, June 16 2010 - Erice and Peter's birthday

After a photo session of all bikes, we took off to Erice. It has been quite a drive into the direction to Palermo, with a stop after an hour of riding at the seaside for a refreshing drink. A long winding road up a steep hill brought us to Erice. It is an ancient town, where we walked around, visited the castle and enjoying Sicilian specialties upon Michele's recommendations for lunch.

It was a sunny, but quite hot day and the way back was long. But we had another stop for water and ice cream (where we have also been informed that Switzerland was leading 1:0 against Spain in the world cup, which gave us another kick for the remaining ride). Hansjörg picked a scenic nice route back and we stopped for gas in Sciacca; unfortunately some of us were not filled up fully by the service personnel. This had consequences for the next day as Silvia and Frank almost ran out of gas.

In the evening, we went to a very nice restaurant, called "Le Gourmet", with the bikes and as a surprise also had a birthday cake for Peter. Next to us was another birthday party of a 90-year old woman and it was interesting to see all the Sicilian tradition; all men have been wearing suits despite quite warm temperatures. Michele directed us safely back to our hotel at night.

Thursday, June 17 2010 - No breakfast but lots of food at the big party with Michele's family

The morning started not very pleasant, as we did not get any breakfast. The excuse of the hotel management was that the personnel had overslept. A bit angry and hungry for caffeine we stopped at the next gas station for a quick espresso shot. Then we headed towards Agrigento and on to Licata, to stop at the Harley Davidson dealer there. We were very friendly welcomed and left the shop with souvenirs, new winker glasses for Hansjörg and a pumped up suspension for Frank to head to a Lido at the beach as it was quite a hot day. We were already warned not to eat too much for lunch as in the evening we were invited to a big party at Michele's family. On the ride back we again passed the Greek temples at Agrigento but unfortunately we were too late to stop and have a closer look.

The party at Michele's parents' garden started at 6 (we will not mention when it ended) and we received a very warm welcome by the whole family with lots of hugs and kisses. Mama Michele, with the help of Berta and the other women of the family, went shopping and prepared food for at least the double amount of people. It started off with 10 kilos !! of mussels (Italian: "Cozze") and then we had grilled and cooked fish (similar amount) including Todaro (similar to Sepia), Spadola, Orata and Sauro accompanied with a fresh garden salad. To relax the stomach (!) the next course was quite light: "Spaghetti con Ricci" (spaghetti with sea urchin). Then we continued with grilled Salsiccia (an Italian sausage) and the highlight was fresh baked pizza tabeshi, which stands for huge table size pizzas. We managed only to eat a quarter of the pizzas unfortunately. After dinner we continued to relax in the beautiful garden under big lemon and olive trees; Kurt and Pepino (Michele's father) had cigars after dinner and of course Hansjörg offered snuff to everybody. Before we left, we were offered melons and "Jägermeister" and Limoncello to support the digestion. It was a real family party and we all felt at home!

Friday 18 June 2010 - Relaxation and even more food!

The day started easy and a bit later with only a small breakfast. Everybody still felt quite full from the day before. At 11 we headed off towards the winery Feudo Arancio, where we met again Michele's family and had a tour of the winery and then lunch with Sicilian specialties, like perfumed oil and wines (for the bikers at most a small tasting zip only).

In the afternoon most of us relaxed at the pool. Kurt and Hansjörg had a guided tour with Michele through Sciacca and tasted sardines and granite. In the evening, after discussions with hotel management regarding the missing breakfast, we received 4 pizza tabeshi's for dinner as compensation.

Saturday 19 June 2010 - On the road again

We started early with full luggage to our trip to Taormina. As we passed Agrigento, we stopped for a visit of the "Valle dei Templi", Greek temples and a Roman city structure. It was very interesting to walk on the same ground as Plato and Aristotle some time ago.

However we got caught in a tourist trap as we signed up for a guided tour by electrical car: We were under the impression that the driver takes us on a round trip, but unfortunately he told us at the far end, that we now have to pay again to enter the temple area and also walk back to the parking lot. We came back later than planned to meet the others who did not sign up for the tour; but definitely also learnt the lesson to clearly ask what exactly is included in an offer!

The rest of the trip was quite pleasant as we passed through mountain areas, where it was not so hot. Our hotel San Giovanni in Giardini Naxos was very nice with a small garage where we could hardly park all our bikes (they obviously expected smaller motorbikes when we made the reservation!). Momo and Frank cooled off in the Mediterranean sea, which was still quite cold.

The highlight at the dinner was our charming "guide" Michele, who surprised each woman in our group with a rose and received "Bacios" in return. Another specialty that evening has been Paul's desert: He ordered a mixed fruit platter and was quite surprised to receive it as "Do It Yourself", as it contained only whole fruits and a knife to cut and peel.

Sunday 20 June 2010 - Up and Around Etna

Hansjörg guided us around and up to Mount Etna, whom we saw at least in the morning without any clouds. After quite a winding road we stopped for lunch at 1900 meter above sea level. Knowing about Sicilian tourist information, we checked carefully and realized that the cable car would only bring us up halfway, and then we would need to switch to a four wheel drive car and finally get a guide to walk up the last part to the volcano crater. Altogether around 80 €, and as it covered up we felt this is not worth it. As we climbed up the mountain the temperature dropped quite significantly and especially the women did feel cold and put on warm sweaters. On the way down we stopped for several photo sessions of the bikes and the volcano. As we approached the sea again, Hansjörg did find a small cafeteria directly at the seaside for a refreshing ice cream stop!

Monday 21 June 2010 - No biking today!

After all of the biking the previous days we decided to take the bus to Taormina. The bus top was directly in front of our hotel, so it was very convenient. We visited the ancient Greek theatre, which was the third largest in the world back then. The acoustics and structure is still impressive. We then walked through Taormina and visited the old city as well as the souvenir shops and designer stores. On the way we saw first a funeral and afterwards a wedding with people quite dressed up despite the hot temperatures. They clearly must have good deodorants in Sicily! At lunch we could enjoy a glass of wine as we did not have to ride back with the bikes.

We were back in time for the start of the world cup match Switzerland versus Chile which some of us watched at big screens on the piazza. Unfortunately Switzerland lost and had to go home! This time Margrit was in charge for selecting the restaurant for dinner and managed to find a very good one with decent prices. Toni and Paul went into Taormina with the bikes to enjoy the nightlife!

Tuesday 22 June 2010 - Tough road to Cefalu

On the way from Giardini Naxos to Cefalu, we had perfect weather conditions at the beginning and also quite nice roads. In the mountain region, Hansjörg used his radio to alarm us of snakes (dead ones, luckily!) and stones on the road. Later on, his alarms referred to huge holes and almost missing roads! Probably the big storms and rain in the weeks before our arrival has made the roads quite bad. In addition to the bad road it also started to rain slightly for the last hour of our ride and the road became quite slippery. But everybody was careful enough and also thanks to Hansjörg's "hole alarms" we managed to arrive safely at the hotel Kalura in Cefalu. Situated directly at the Mediterranean Sea, it is quite a paradise for relaxation; of course for Paul it was a paradise due to free WLAN access. We had dinner at the hotel and – according to rumors – a smaller group, who continued to play pool at the bar, are now blood brothers and will have no issues in Lecce, where Antonio is from. However this procedure must have been quite tough, as they needed sun glasses in the morning at the breakfast table!

Wednesday 23 June 2010 - Free day for everybody

We had no organized program for this day and some stayed at the pool to freshen up their tan while two groups went into Cefalu; one with the bikes (the brotherhood from the night before) and the others by bus. Cefalu is a very nice small city with an old cathedral (dated from 12th century) with golden mosaic at the ceiling. We also visited a medieval washing place where you can still see the stones and washing pots. We wanted to go out with the bikes for dinner, but the selected restaurants did not have parking spaces in front of them, so we stayed at the hotel for dinner. They prepared a big screen for the match Germany and Ghana, where Germany did win and therefore advanced further, which made at least one of the group quite happy!

Thursday 24 June 2010 - Last day in Sicily

In the morning we again had to pack the bikes with our baggage, as we headed towards Palermo to board the ferry for the return trip. As usual, Paul was early, so we really had to give him credit and discontinue the jokes about him being late! We did not directly go to Palermo, but, upon specific wish, mad a detour through Prizzi and Corleone to maybe find the remainders of the Mafia. Except for small and narrow roads nothing specific could be identified; to the contrary: Corleone appeared to be quite a small and sleepy village.

As we came through the mountains, we had a terrific view of Palermo and the seaside and slowed down to find a good spot for pictures. Therefore, we also heard Peter's voice on the radio mentioning that a Vespa is now overtaking us from behind. On the way to Palermo we tried to find the Harley dealer in Monreale and managed to navigate through the smallest and narrowest roads possible. We almost would have needed to

retract the mirrors, not to mention the cobblestone pavements of the “streets”. But we finally arrived at the dealer only to find the shop closed for the day as the match Italy versus Slovakia which was about to start soon.

We then drove into Palermo and found the streets almost empty, probably because of the game. As we had some spare time we stopped at a bar close to the harbor and watched as well. Italy unfortunately (?) lost and was out of the world cup, so it was quite calm and quiet after the match and we arrived easily at the ferry and boarded it. It appeared to be less crowded than on the way to Palermo and we enjoyed the dinner on board and a quiet and relaxing night.

Friday 25 June 2010 - On the way to Ghiffa

Some of us did not have enough sunshine and tan during the holidays and grilled on the sundeck. At lunch time we had “grilled Berta” and “fried Margrit”. It was very good weather and we could see the islands Montecristo and Elba quite well as we passed them. As the sea was calm, we arrived a bit earlier in Genoa and started to head towards Ghiffa. Unfortunately Margrit and Kurt had to head back directly to Switzerland, as their daughter has become sick; Toni joined them on the way home and they arrived home safely after midnight. The others headed towards the hotel Paradiso in Ghiffa for a stopover and then back home the next day.

As we entered the “Bermuda triangle” around Alessandria we were directed towards the wrong direction, but managed to turn around at the next toll station and get back onto the right track. With this small detour we were able to use up all of our credit on the viacard, so at least did use all of the road we paid for. We arrived at around 9:30 in Ghiffa and already saw the full moon on the way and later at dinner again. Spain did win against Honduras and also advanced to the eighth finals, so Berta was very happy.

Saturday 26 June 2010 - Tremola and back home

After a very good breakfast we headed towards Switzerland. Some of us did not yet have enough of winding roads in bad condition and took the old Tremola road up to the Gotthard. The others and especially the ones with older bikes went on the less winding new road up to Gotthard pass. After a good “Bratwurst” we said good bye to each other and headed home on the different routes.

It has been a truly marvelous and inspiring holiday and there are so many impressions to digest. Even as I am writing up this roadbook I can still smell the taste of Sicily!