

Footprints Along the Paths

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This past summer in July and August of 2011 my wife and I followed the footprints left by some of the incidents portrayed in the Sherlock Holmes stories. We were scheduled for a conference in Belgium and I had received approval by Clare Hopkins, archivist at Trinity College, Oxford, to view Monsignor Ronald Knox's papers. These original manuscripts and the Gryphon Book of Minutes were made available by Sharon Cure, the librarian. It was a combination of these events that enabled us to imprint our own footprints along the paths of Sherlock Holmes. We followed them at Richenbach Falls, visited the Sherlock Holmes Museum in Meiringen Switzerland, and then pounded the pavement following both maps 1 and 2 of Paul Gardner's *Sherlock Holmes Walk* in London.

Mons Belgium

Unexpectedly while attending the European Reading Association Conference in Mons Belgium, where my wife gave a keynote speech, we happened upon a Sherlock Holmes Pub on a side street just off the Grand Place. It was the Sherlock Holmes portrait on the sign that attracted my attention (see photo).



Upon entering we were pleasantly surprised to see three-dimensional wooden carvings and paintings that adorned the walls. They depicted several scenes from the stories. One of the portraits illustrated Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson in a train car; reminiscent of Sydney Paget's "Silver Blaze."



The interior was small and reminded me of the former Sherlock Holmes Pub in Nashville where we once held our meetings.

Meiringen and Richenbach Falls

After taking a train from Brussels to Paris and then an airplane to Switzerland, we made Zurich our base. One of our train journeys took us to Meiringen and the Richenbach Falls. We left Zurich by train to Luzern; changed trains on route to Meiringen and the Falls. As we pulled into the train station, a sunny day turned somewhat grey with intermingled drizzle and hard rainfall – a foreshadowing of what was to come.



We left the train station, walked across the street, and took a bus a short distance to the bottom of the Richenbach Falls. The bus driver knew exactly the stop we wanted. I didn't know then that the short dialogue in which we engaged would later provide a referent for both him and me. He dropped us off to begin our trek.

We purchased our tickets at the booth and boarded the funicular. Riding the railway car provided an extraordinary view of what was below and what was to come.



As we approached and departed from our car the spray of the falls slightly dampened our clothes and careened against our faces. We were not deterred!



We looked down at the bottom of the falls and were taken in by the amount of water pouring down the side of the mountain. The water looked as if it filled a cavity, blue in color, and offered a glimpse into what were to happen if one should plunge within its recesses.

Looking up the mountain at the falls we sensed that this was a place that was believable in the eyes of Conan Doyle for Sherlock Holmes to meet his end in “The Final Problem.” The setting is spectacular and the sounds of the falls coupled with the changing winds and weather provide a backdrop for such an event to take place.



Walking the path upwards was a spiritual experience. As we climbed the path the waterfall became more intense and our footsteps became embedded in the soil as the climb became more challenging. The path was narrow and the rain kept us on guard. One could imagine the thoughts of both Holmes and Moriarty as each made his way along the cliffs for the anticipated combat. Vicki kept her spirits high and braved the elements.



I was able to keep pace as we trudged up the path that presented us with glorious views of the falls and surrounding area. We were troopers.



At the departure point, Vicki embellished the Sherlock Holmes adventure by posing behind Sherlock garb in the rain.



We viewed photographs one of which was the visit by the members of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London in 2005.



We glanced up to the “star” marker that depicts where Holmes and Moriarty fought and were struck by its distance from the waterfalls.



Before boarding the funicular for our journey downward we took a last look at the valley below.



We began our trip downward along the steep embankment.



The fog and the rain provided a dismal, yet exciting backdrop to our memorable journey. When reaching the bottom of the funicular we departed and viewed the plaque of Sherlock Holmes.



Meiringen and the Sherlock Holmes Museum (Moriarty's presence felt).

The bus and familiar driver returned us to the town of Meiringen. I didn't know how much the bus driver would be appreciated when he had first taken us from the train station to the funicular and then back to the train station the drop off point. Vicki and I made our way in the rain to the Sherlock Holmes Museum. Upon arriving we were asked if we wanted to leave our coats or bags behind the counter. I reached for my backpack and was more than surprised that I was not carrying it. I knew that the camera with the chip of many photos was in the backpack along with a journal I had been keeping, and the return train tickets, so I was very concerned. I quickly walked back to the bus station across from the train station. I was not sure if I had left it on the funicular or on the bus. There were three buses parked at the station and I was able to

inquire about the bus driver who drove us earlier. I was informed that he would be returning within twenty minutes.

As I waited I couldn't but wonder if there was some sort of misdeed that had occurred. I could not dismiss the thought that Professor Moriarty's spirit was lurking about to do mischievous deeds to unwary travelers. "My missing backpack." A coincidence? His image was clear as I peered through the raindrops waiting for the bus to return.



I anxiously waited until the driver wheeled the bus into the station. Peering through the windshield wipers he saw me and gave the thumbs up. I knew then that my backpack was secure. He assured me that nothing was missing and that he knew I would be waiting for him. I thanked him profusely and returned to the Museum - looking over my shoulder as I walked.

The Museum contained many artifacts among which a replica of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson's room with items arranged meticulously so as to depict its furnishings. The plan of the room, shown below, illustrates the painstaking efforts that were taken to create a room that corresponded with the descriptions given in the stories.



There were display cases containing uniforms and items from the era. Also photographs adorned the walls of the events depicted in the story. One interesting display was a certificate honoring Sherlock Holmes as a citizen of Meiringen.



Of course the duel between Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty were on display.



As was a portrait of the literary agent: A. Conan Doyle.



Outside the museum the statue of Sherlock Holmes resides with a plaque that reads:

Homage To
Sherlock Holmes
Sculpture
John Doubleday 1988



The bronze statue portrays Sherlock Holmes in a pensive, yet energetic, mood ready to take on a case of interest. Or is he, like I was, pondering the misdeeds of the Professor?

Walking the streets of Meiringen one could imagine the hansom cabs that once traversed these avenues; now transitioned and replaced by the automobile. Some shops still retain the memories of times long ago; even hotels with references to Sherlock Holmes lure today's travelers to their inns.



We returned to the train station for our return to Zurich. And so it was that a trip to Meiringen lead to a spectacular view of the Falls, a wander through the town, a visit to the museum, and an encounter (perhaps imaginary) with the Professor.



The next day we packed our suitcases for London and another series of footprints to follow along the Sherlock Holmes Walk. We did indeed tread the streets of London and have photos to show our footprints, and made our way to Trinity College in Oxford and viewed Monsignor Knox papers. However, that report is for another time – perhaps a presentation in pictures at our local gathering, a paper for a journal article, or a conference presentation.