

We begin at the first placard showing the camp layout. The prisoner area is only a small part of the whole camp. The supporting infrastructure covered a large area and included housing and offices for the SS and tracts for growing herbs and food. We pass through the gate; words in wrought iron state "Albeit Macht Frei" (work makes one free). The grounds are immense, populated with several large groups of school children who are required by law to visit concentration camp as part of their education. Designed to hold 6,000 prisoners, the camp strained to accommodate up to 37,000 in the final years of the war. It operated from 1933-1945. We visit the bunker, where special prisoners such as members of the clergy were held, while others were abused and murdered ("special" had a dual meaning).

We find a sitting area outside the camp grounds to take a lunch break. We break out the picnic supplies that we bought in Munich yesterday, along with an excellent bottle of red wine. Despite the overcast skies, it's a very pleasant day for a picnic. Back inside the main museum, we browse the many placards through several rooms that chronicle the rise of Nazi-ism and describe daily life in the camp. We watch a 22-minute film which left everyone in the audience feeling stunned and contemplative.

We tour a restored barracks, then walk down a long path to view Christian and Jewish memorials to the fallen. A functioning Christian church is part of the memorial. Last is the crematorium, which includes a gas chamber disguised as a shower, and a row of ovens with gurneys positioned in front of them. Amy says that she saw three teenage girls leaving in tears.

After more than four hours, our tour finally comes to an end. We catch the bus back to the train station, where we see more lovely lasses dressed for Oktoberfest. The event is a major money-maker for restaurants far and near. Many close down for two weeks due to the extraordinary profit potential that Oktoberfest affords them. At the Hauptbahnhof, we find the Hertz Car Rental counter upstairs, then walk across the street to the parking garage. En route, we meet a friendly American from Chicago, who points us to the Augustiner Biergarten, one of Munich's oldest and best. Two blocks later, we are seated in a large room dominated by oak woodcarvings and antlers. Our waiter is efficient, with a touch of good humor. For some reason, he seems reluctant to bring Karen foil for her inevitable leftovers. One of the waitresses who is setting a reserved table behinds us accuses our group of "stealing the pretzels", which is amusing if not bizarre.

Our car is a Ford Focus, an economical four-door with ample trunk space. We drive away from the Hauptbahnhof down Arnulfstrasse until we come to signs directing us to the autobahn heading south. We make the drive home in about an hour and 10 minutes.

## **Thursday, September 28<sup>th</sup>                      Schliersee**

The weather has cleared somewhat, although cooler than when we first arrived. Today we decide on a road trip, first to the cable car on a nearby mountain, then to [Andechs Monastery](#). We drive south of Schliersee, getting our first good view of the lake. We stop for pictures and a short stroll along the shore. En route to the cable car, about 8 KM south of Schliersee, traffic comes to a halt as we pass through a small town. As we watch, a herd of cattle is being driven down the middle of the street. Further up on the mountainside, we stop again to allow another herd to pass. The cows are festooned with brightly colored plumage atop their heads. Of the many pictures we take, many cry out for a caption from Gary Larson, the *Far Side* author. We learn later that as farmers bring their cows down from the alpine meadows in the fall, cows wearing hats indicate a good year; unadorned bovines mean things did not go well.

The cable car station is situated near a small lake. You can pay 13€ for a round trip, or buy a one-way ticket and hike down. The ten-minute ride to the summit offers spectacular views of the lake valley below. Hikers can be seen heading down the trails, carrying walk sticks that resemble ski poles. At the restaurant, we enjoy a tall beer and views of the next valley and multiple ranges of



*It's been a good year for these farmers, as the plumage worn by their cows will attest.*

Alps. The brochures inform us that this is a popular ski area in winter, with cheap lift tickets: e.g., 63€ for a 3-day pass.

Around noon, we leave for Andechs Monastery. We admire the gorgeous countryside during the drive, with lots of green meadows. We also have to slow down for the occasional tractor on the two-lane road. We take a wrong turn north at Bad Tölz, marking the beginning of our education concerning German road signs. We learn that major roads are (usually) marked by yellow signs, and are clearly numbered. Multiple signs can be misleading. We find our way south again by a circuitous route, then over more country roads to Andechs. The monastery is a cluster of buildings perched on a hill, dominated by a large restaurant and patio deck overlooking the verdant fields below. Amy gamely navigates the multiple stairways leading up the hill. True to Rick Steves' description, we are served medieval-sized portions of roast pork, potatoes, and sauerkraut, all for about 6€. Ein Mass beers are only 2.80€. Our bench seats near a glassed-in patio offer a great view. Feeling very full and satisfied, we return home by a more direct route in about 1 ½ hours, with plenty of time for a relaxing sauna back at the AlpenClub.

**Friday, September 29<sup>th</sup>**

**Schliersee**

After another fine breakfast buffet (will we be able to eat a "normal" breakfast ever again?), we head once again toward Bad Tölz (pronounced Baaaaaaaad TOHWLZ), then turn south toward Oberammergau. Linderhof Palace, King Ludwig II's summer retreat, lies in a valley surrounded by towering peaks less than 12 KM from Oberammergau. The main palace grounds are a short 10-minute walk from the ticket booth. The palace is relatively small, with servants quarters on the ground floor and the upper floor reserved for King Ludwig. In front is a large fountain and pool. In

back is a tiered waterfall and statuary, viewable from the king's bedroom window. Immaculately tended gardens with brightly colored flower beds flank the palace building. The interior is ornate beyond description, evoking gasps and exclamations from those on our tour. The king was a very private individual, and rarely entertained here (what a WASTE!) The "magic table" brought his meals to his 2<sup>nd</sup> floor dining room from the kitchen below, so that he would have minimal interaction with the servants. He was extremely shy, and certified as paranoid before his suspicious death in 1887.

Leaving the palace, we ascend the steep pathway behind, leading to the grotto. The grotto is man-made, and was used as a concert hall where Richard Wagner's compositions were played in front of a fresco honoring the composer. Though cool, the grotto could be heated to room temperature in about two days!

We head to Oberammergau, where we enjoy a leisurely lunch at a café on a brilliant sunny afternoon. Afterwards, we stroll down the walking street while Karen and Amy dart happily in and out of shops, admiring the clothing and souvenirs. We buy an Italian ice cream (gelato), then head back to the AlpenClub. We enjoy at last dinner in the bar, while working in a final sauna.

### **Saturday, September 30<sup>th</sup>                      Füssen**

Craig and Amy leave the AlpenClub at 6:15am by taxi. After a last breakfast at AlpenClub, we pack the car and head for Füssen. Karen smuggles meat and cheese sandwiches and fruit from the buffet. We stop to top off the tank, then stop at Norma supermarket for a bottle of wine and some chocolate cookies. We have no luck finding a Styrofoam travel cooler. The Germans, being ever so



*Beautiful Linderhof Palace was used little by King Ludwig, but is now enjoyed by many.*

environmentally cautious, have probably banned Styrofoam products. As we pass by the Durnbach War Memorial and Cemetery for the third time, we decide to turn around and pay it a visit. The memorial honors the mainly British, Canadian, and Indian aviators who died in WWII. Several thousand grave sites are marked with white crosses.

I set the car to run on autopilot as we pass one last time through Bad Tölz. On to Bad Kohlgrub, then right toward Füssen and uncharted territory. We pass through rolling farmland characterized by emerald green meadows, large farmhouses (always with flowers in the balconies), and occasional hamlets. We arrive at Schwangau (meaning "swan" in German) noticing signs pointing to the castles. We proceed another 2 KM to Füssen, and pass a Tourist Information (TI) office as we approach the busy Zentrum. We park in an underground garage marked by a blue "P", then hike two blocks back to the TI. The girl waiting on us answers our questions with a mixture of boredom and indifference, but we learn the location of the castles and the town of Pinswang on the local map. After relaxing with a beer at a café on the main walking street, we drive 5 minutes to the castle parking lot, which appears full. We park, then hike up the hill to the busy ticket center, only to learn that the last castle tour would end after our hotel check-in time. We decide to come back early tomorrow morning then head out for Pinswang and check in to the Gutshof zum Schluxen. We make time for a quick side trip to Reutte before dinner. Near the border, we pass by an Austrian gas station and notice that the price per liter has dropped by 18 cents! It reminds us of the heavy 16% tax on consumer goods in Germany, with God knows how many other taxes piled onto the price of gas. Seventeen years after the fall of the Berlin wall, Germany is still struggling to rebuild its eastern region.

**Sunday, October 1<sup>st</sup>**

**Staufen**

We wake up early, around 6:00am, to get a jump on the tourist traffic going to the castles. As I floss my teeth absent-mindedly, the temporary cap pops off my wisdom tooth. Damn! In hindsight, I should've stopped flossing altogether this trip. We pack quickly and load the car, while a drizzling



*The countryside near Gutshof zum Schluxen in Pinswang, Austria, is easy on the eyes.*

rain falls from the slate gray sky. When we arrive at the breakfast room, many from the tour group are already seated. The breakfast buffet table offers the usual tasty choices, including scrambled eggs, sausages, bread and muffins, fruit, and other delicacies. Somehow the sausage tastes much better here than at home - less greasy and fatty. With my first sip of hot coffee, I am pleased to find that my tooth is not overly sensitive to the heat. More importantly, it is not susceptible to pain from cold beer, which I discover later.

The waitress is doing double-duty, checking on the status of the buffet while working the reception desk. We check out and rush to the car, pulling out just ahead of the massive tour bus. As we pass through the small town situated in the middle of a large green meadow, we notice groups of people milling about near their cars parked on the side of the road. What grabs our attention is that they are dressed in traditional Tyrolean lederhosen and dirndls. Some are carrying musical instruments, and appear to be heading for a church.

We pass by the gas station, tempted to take advantage of the lower prices, but are reluctant to stop because we want to beat the crowds to the castles. As we approach the castles on the windy, tree-lined road, we are rewarded by a view of Hohenschwangau Castle. With no traffic behind us, we stop in the middle of the road and snap a picture. When we arrive at the parking lot, we find the parking lot nearly deserted. We wait at the toll booth until the attendant arrives to accept the 4€ fee. He then directs us – quite specifically – to a spot next to the only other car parked in the lot. We find this a bit strange, but consistent with the German propensity for giving precise if not emphatic instructions (usually punctuated with an exclamation point).

We walk up the hill to ticket office, where we are first in line to buy tickets. We are given a map with instructions to arrive at specific times for our English language tours of [Hohenschwangau](#) and [Neuschwanstein](#) castles. When we ask how long the hike is, we are told that the map indicates 20 minutes, however “that is only for really old people” says the attendant. “It should only take you about 10 minutes to hike up the hill to Hohenschwangau.” While Karen hangs out in the Mueller Hotel lounge, I return to the car for reading material. On the return trip, I pass a horse drawn carriage. Both the driver and horses are dozing while they can, as a drizzling rain begins to fall. Soon the streets will be filled with tourists, and they will have no rest for several hours. As we wait in the hotel lounge, we plot our course on the map for the afternoon trip to Staufen.



*Hohenschwangau Castle*

As the rain begins to subside, we begin the short ascent to Hohenschwangau Castle up a switchback trail. With a commanding view of the alpine valley below, Hohenschwangau – whose name means “high swan” – is Neuschwanstein Castle’s little sister. Perched on a high rocky plateau, the castle’s mustard colored walls make it easy to locate against the backdrop of dark green forest. Soon we arrive at the base of the castle, where tourists are milling about in front of an electronic billboard that announces the last tour numbers called. Our tour number is printed on our tickets. When our time arrives, our tour number appears on the board and we head up the stairs and through the large entry door. The view of the valley below is breathtaking, with the town of Schwangau in the foreground, a large lake in the background, and the magnificent alps beyond.

As our German guide leads us through the many rooms of Hohenschwangau Castle, we learn about its history. It was the childhood residence of King Ludwig II of Bavaria and was built by his father, King Maximilian II of Bavaria. It was built on the remains of the fortress Schwanstein, which was first mentioned in historical records dating from the 12th century. A family of knights was responsible for the construction of the medieval fortress. After the demise of the knights in the 16th century the fortress changed hands several times. The decay of the fortress continued until it finally fell into ruins at the beginning of the 19th century.

In 1829 Crown Prince Maximilian (the later King Maximilian II of Bavaria) discovered the historic site and reacted enthusiastically to the beauty of the surrounding area. He acquired the property in 1832. One year later the reconstruction of the Castle began, continuing until 1837.

Hohenschwangau was the official summer and hunting residence of Maximilian, his wife Marie of Prussia and their two sons Ludwig (the later King Ludwig II of Bavaria) and Otto (the later King Otto I of Bavaria). The young princes spent many years of their adolescence here. The King and Queen lived in the main building, the boys in the annex.

King Maximilian died in 1864 and his son Ludwig succeeded to the throne, moving into his father's room in the castle. As Ludwig never married, his mother Marie was able to continue living on her floor. King Ludwig enjoyed living in Hohenschwangau, especially after 1869 when the building of his own castle, Neuschwanstein, began only a stone's throw from his parental home.

After Ludwig's death in 1886 Queen Marie was the castle's only resident until she in turn died in 1889. Her brother-in-law, Prince Regent Luitpold of Bavaria, the castle's last inhabitant, lived on the 3rd floor of the main building. He was responsible for the electrification in 1905 and the installation of an electric elevator. Luitpold died in 1912 and the palace was opened as a museum during the following year.

During World War I and World War II the castle suffered no damage. It is still owned by the former royal house of Bavaria, the Wittelsbach family. More than 300,000 visitors from all over the world visit the palace each year.

With an hour to go before our tour of Neuschwanstein Castle, we decide to join the throngs who hike up the long steep road from the village of Schwangau to the castle. Occasionally a horse drawn carriage passes us, but it's a pleasant day for a hike and we need the exercise. As we near the castle base, we are met head on by a mob of Japanese tourists. Again, the view of the valley is spectacular, with the towns of Schwangau and Fussen visible below.

[Neuschwanstein Castle](#) is credited with being the inspiration for [Walt Disney's Sleeping Beauty](#) castle. It was built in the late 1800's, when castles and fortresses were no longer strategically necessary. Instead, it was born of pure fantasy – a beautiful, romantic composition of towers and walls in the perfect setting of mountains and lakes. The combination of various architectural styles and intrinsic craftwork has inspired generations of adults and children alike.



*Neuschwanstein Castle*

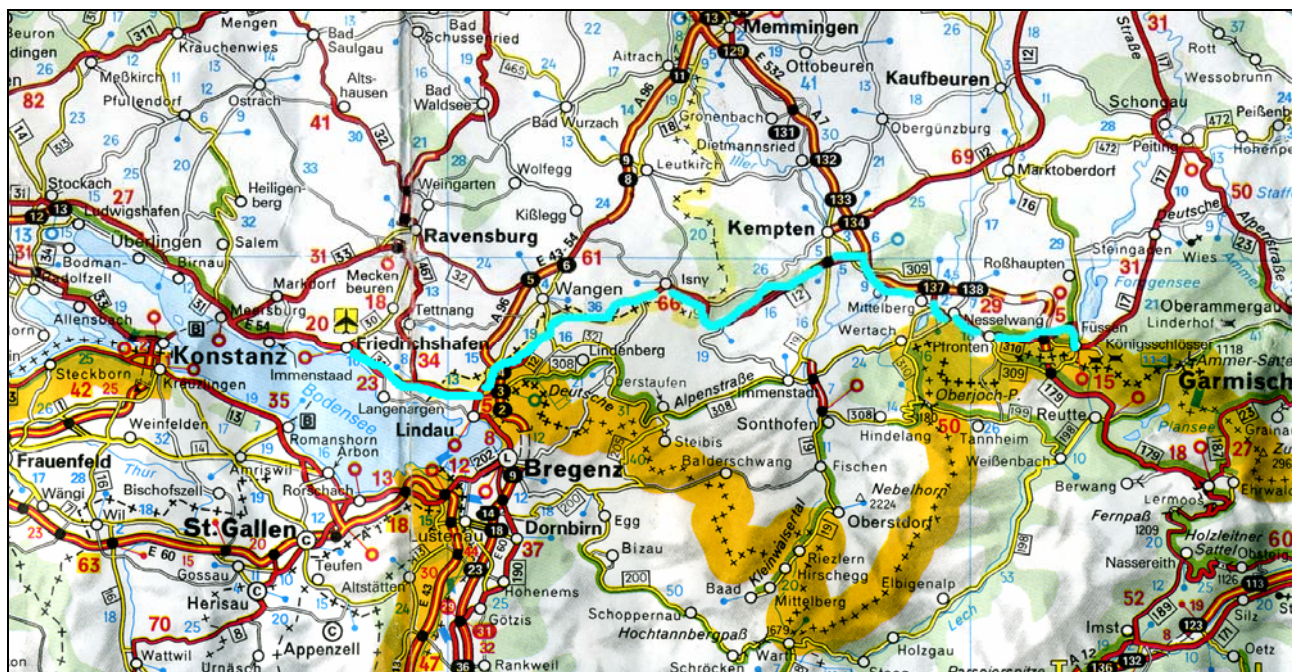
Construction was started by King Ludwig II of Bavaria, also known as "Mad King Ludwig". Owing to his eccentricities and his perceived use of Bavarian funds (a myth, as Ludwig actually used his own money to finance the construction of the castle), Ludwig was removed from power before the castle was completed. Never married, he was diagnosed as suffering from paranoia shortly before his death at age 42. He drowned in Lake Starnberg in 1886 under mysterious circumstances. Soon afterward, the castle was opened to the public. The castle was named after the Swan Knight, Lohengrin, of Richard Wagner's opera. Many tapestries and paintings depict scenes from the operas of Wagner, a reflection of Ludwig's love for Wagner's work. However, many of the interior rooms remain undecorated; only 14 rooms were finished before Ludwig's death.

We climb several flights of stairs to get to the upper living quarters where the king and servants lived. Particularly impressive is the use of rare wood throughout, and the intricate carvings in the ceiling and bedposts of the king's bedroom. There is even a washbasin with a swan shaped faucet, which was gravity fed from the river flowing above the castle. We pass through the grotto room, where the king liked to read by candlelight and take a glass of wine. It reminds us of the grotto at Linderhof palace. Finally we arrive at the Singers Hall, made entirely of wood with magnificent chandeliers and a stage with a backdrop of Wagnerian woodlands. We learn that the hall is still used for concerts today.

At the end of our 45 minute tour, we begin the long descent to the Schwangau village below. The shortcut through the forest is much steeper than the road we ascended, but that doesn't discourage the dozens of hikers coming up from the village.

As we leave Fussen and the castles behind, the rain begins to fall more steadily. I figure it will be about a 6-hour drive to Staufen. As the road meanders through several small towns, I begin to

wonder if it won't take much longer. After 45 minutes, the rain has eased as we reach a stretch of the autobahn and accelerate to 140 KPH (87 MPH). We don't realize how hungry we are until Karen opens several small packets of cheese (including the delicious, nutty KRAUTER cheese) with sliced sausage and bread. Soon the autobahn morphs into a 2-lane road, reducing our speed to a pedestrian 50 MPH. We arrive at Friedrichshafen 2.5 hours after leaving Fussen; it's the first large city we've encountered so far. Traffic backs up at a stoplight, and it takes several cycles to get through it. As we cruise along at about 42 MPH, we're suddenly blinded by a flash of light on our right. We realize our picture has just been taken for "speeding", although our 42 MPH seems safe enough on an unobstructed four-lane road. Oh well.



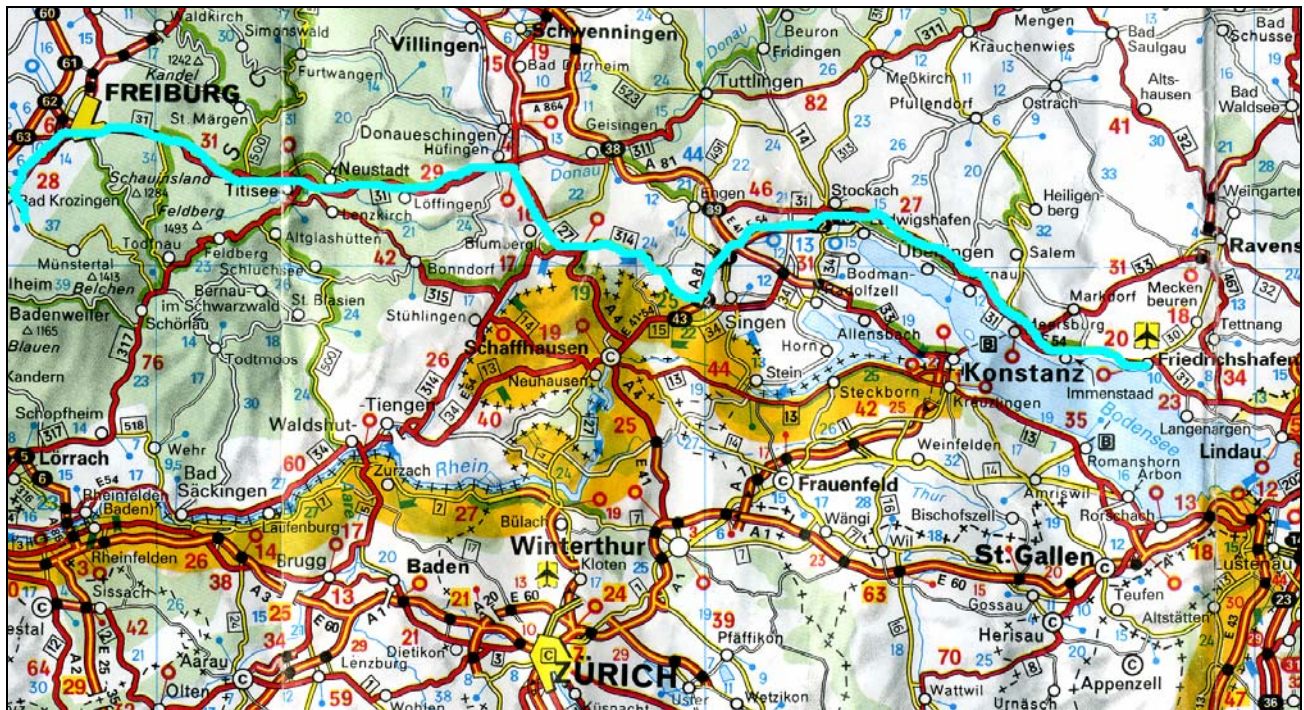
*The road from Fussen to Friedrichshafen*

As we approach Konstanz, we get our first view of the lake which bears its name. With the shore of Switzerland visible in the distance, Lake Konstanz resembles a sea more than a lake. We can see a very little boat traffic as the rain begins to intensify. Nevertheless, we are making good time, as the road meanders through more small villages. As we come to a roundabout, I continue driving in circles until we figure out the directional signs. By now we are also vigilant for more sneaky cameras, and spot one at the entrance to the next village. I can't resist giving a one-finger salute.

After a few more miles, we are once again on the autobahn and soon arrive at a point where the road signs become meaningless. We realize that the map lacks sufficient detail to guide us to the appropriate off ramp. As we approach the exit for "Singin", I pull to a stop on the painted asphalt median until we can figure out which way to go. The decision to forego a GPS is coming back to haunt me. We exit the autobahn, then watch the yellow directional signs carefully as we approach Singin. At times they appear contradictory, and may fail to appear at critical junctures, forcing last-second decisions which could be hit or miss. Karen and I congratulate ourselves after finding the elusive onramp to the autobahn in the direction of Donaueschingen. We try not to sprain our tongues pronouncing the long German names, while certain that we are finding creative new ways to butcher the language.

The road begins to descend dramatically as it meanders back and forth down the side of a mountain. The sunlight begins to fade as we arrive at the bottom of a gorge, with a river rushing by on our right. We emerge into a low, wide valley with high foothills on both sides. As the road straightens, we are surrounded by green farmland dotted with small houses. We soon enter a long tunnel; when we finally emerge into the sunlight again several minutes later, we have arrived in downtown Freiburg.





*The road from Friedrichshafen to Staufien*

After our misadventures on the autobahn, Karen is now monitoring the map and directional signs with the intensity of an NFL offensive coordinator on Game Day. She guides us south on route 3 toward Bad Krozingen. We pass a world-class sized McDonalds on the right and though hungry, we resist temptation and keep going. The road changes from a highway into a bi-way, passing through meadows giving way to low foothills covered with vineyards on our left. Although out of sight, the Rhine River is a stone's throw away on our right. We've traveled 310 KM, or about 186 miles, in about 5 hours.

After a few twists and turns, we find a sign for Staufien, 3 KM. We come to a stop light at the entrance to the little town, noticing the trademark old castle standing guard on a vineyard covered hill. After traveling past a few residential buildings and shops, we finally arrive at the entrance to the medieval town. We are delighted to find dozens of people milling about in period costume outside the faux gated entryway. I spy an elderly gentleman dressed in a red courtiers outfit, and ask him in German for directions to Gasthaus Zum Lowen. He speaks at length, and I'm able to pick out a few critical words and phrases which amount to "there's no parking inside, so park out here then walk in. You'll find the hotel down that street." It's amazing what you can understand when you listen with all of your senses, invaluable when you know so little of the language.

We find a parking place up the hill, then walk back through the faux gate. The costumed revelers are still milling about, waiting to begin a parade down the ancient streets of Staufien. We walk a ways, passing stalls selling food, gifts, and beer. We arrive at a square, where musicians with medieval instruments take the stage and begin a raucous tune, whipping the audience into a hand clapping frenzy. While Karen goes in search of a restroom, I attempt to get my bearings and notice that our hotel is directly behind us, right next to the square. We make our way up the stairs, across, and down to the reception desk on the other side of the building. Not surprisingly, no one is there. I return to the attached restaurant in front to find a pleasant waitress who returns through the kitchen to the front desk where she greets Karen. Suddenly, the sounds of a parade fill the air. I watch the festivities with a ring-side seat from the restaurant window, filming the musicians as the performance winds down.

The waitress/receptionist reunites me with Karen, and we go upstairs to room 15. It is large, with a double bed with "karate chop" pillows, a satellite TV, spacious bathroom, and a view to the rooftop