



## Nick

### From Burlington Central to Switzerland

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There are no orange glowing mountains on the horizon as I write my third and final beaver tale, instead its gray and rainy outside. But that's okay because today is the first day I've seen a drop of rain or a cloud filled sky since February, not bad.

It's been an extraordinary three months since last time I wrote my Beaver Tale. I've been lucky enough to experience Switzerland's warmest and driest spring in a long time and I've made sure to take advantage of it. I got to ski in 10-15 degree weather until the end of March. Even as my season rental for my skis ran out, there was still plenty of snow to go around. It was a sad day for me when I had to bring my skis back to the shop, because I knew I wouldn't be able to ski in Switzerland again for a while. But when I looked down at the skis completely worn down edges, I knew I had used my time well.

Just two days after I brought my skis back, I was headed to Italy for a weeklong rotary trip. We took the train first to Rome, where we stayed 3 and a half days. We took a tour of the Vatican on our first day there, and on our second we toured some of the ancient ruins in the city. It was really cool to see all the places that I had heard so much about in school and movies before. My favorite part was when we climbed to the top of St. Peter's Basilica for an amazing view over the entire city. On Thursday we packed up and took the train back north to Venice, where we stayed for one and a half days. First we were lead through the city by a tour guide who showed us the major sites and told us about the city's history. Afterwards we spent 5 or 6 hours just walking through the city, down every little alley we could find. Once we left the large groups of other tourists behind, we really got to experience the city's quiet beauty. We also found time to take a gondola ride through the water alleys, a must when visiting Venice. By the end of the day we were sun burnt and tired, but we managed to see a great deal of the city. We slept most of the way back to Switzerland the next day.

The end of our week in Italy was also the beginning of my three week long fall holiday. I did a lot of traveling with other exchange students in this time. Taking

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advantage of our train passes, we went to Bellinzona and Lugano down to the far south of Switzerland, a five-hour ride each way. There we explored the four large castles that once guarded the valley. They were completely open to the public, so we climbed the towers and got to see the views out over the valley. We defiantly spent more time on trains than in the cities that day, but it was worth it nonetheless. Our next trip was to the Rhein Waterfalls, on the border between Switzerland and Germany. The massive waterfalls are surrounded by platforms, and you can walk right out over the rushing water. Then we traveled further up the river to the village of Stein am Rhein, famous for its colorful buildings and rich history.

A few days later I hiked up to Lake Oschinen, nestled right into the Alps and surrounded by huge glaciers. Around the lake is a slippery clay beach that looks almost man made, there were also lots of little waterfalls feeding into the lake, which we were able to hike right up to, but not into because the water was freezing. I say this almost every time I go hiking, but here is my new favorite place in Switzerland.

For the last week of holidays, just before Easter, my host family took me along with them on vacation to the south of France. Every year at Easter the entire family goes to relax on the beautiful and famous lagoon. We played volleyball on the beach, flew kites and windsurfed. After a bit of practice I was actually pretty good at windsurfing too. Aside from the activities, I really enjoyed the food in France. We had large family meals every night with plenty of home cooked food to go around. Otherwise we went and tried out local restaurants and foods. I'm proud to say I got to try real French escargot in a French seafood restaurant. It was pretty good too.

I have a lot to look forward to in my last few weeks here. Next weekend I'll be touring the Parliament building with my Rotary Club, and then afterwards I have a hiking trip with my school. It's going to be a busy time as I try to do all the things that I have not yet done, but I'm looking forward to every moment of it.

Liebe

*Nick*

**Switzerland**