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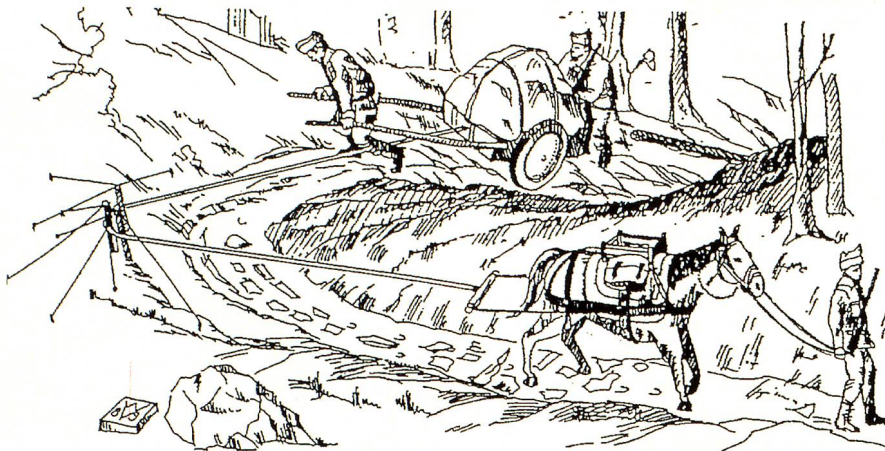
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The mule tracks live again: new polish on an old glory?



Zeichnung: Werner Vogel MS

Many of the historical transport routes, especially those which crossed the great mountain passes, were amongst medieval Europe's most important trading ways. Even in the old days, such routes could have an international fame and status, and they could also be of central importance for the economies of the regions through which they travelled. The organisation of trade

in goods was largely a matter of the ownership of mules; it was run either by individuals or by transport companies of some great size, as the so-called "Ports" of Canton Grisons. The mule tracks of old are not only a wonderful experience in terms of landscape, but they were also very well-built roads in their day. They had to be, for they were heavily used and needed to be efficient.

After two years of careful renovation, the Septimer mule track was reopened in its new form in October 1991. On the Berne side of the Susten Pass, the old mule track is also being renovated so that the future walker will be able to reach the summit in peace far from the madding traffic of the road. And many stretches of the great Simplon mule track which flourished in the seventeenth-century under the celebrated Valais trading baron, Kaspar Jodok von Stockalper, have been renovated over the last few years.

Even if these mule tracks are no longer used for trading purposes, we can

Thanks to turnaround posts (or rollers) it was possible in the old days to climb steep slopes, as this experiment on the Little Maloja, Canton Grisons, shows.

nevertheless rejoice that some of the old contours of the great mountain passes have been brought back to life. The modern walker will not be subject to most of the strains and dangers which were the lot of the muleteers of old, but as he passes along these great ways of medieval times he will be able to let his imagination work.

Hans Schüpbach



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