

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 10 (1944-1945)
Heft: 6

Artikel: The great Swiss Alpine tunnels : St. Gotthard, Simplon & Loetschberg
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-942758>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 04.01.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

HELVETIA



Monthly Publication of the

SWISS BENEVOLENT SOCIETY
in New Zealand

Group New Zealand of the N.H.G.

WELLINGTON.
MARCH, 1945.

Vol. 5, 10th YEAR.

CONCLUSION OF ALLIED TRADE NEGOTIATIONS WITH SWITZERLAND.

In its broadcast to New Zealand on the 13th March, the Swiss Radio made the following comments on the conclusion of the allied trade negotiations with Switzerland:-

"After 3½ weeks' negotiations with the delegations from U.S.A., Britain and France, the trade talks have come to an end. Only a small part of the agreement can be made public, but on the whole we can say that Switzerland may regard it as a great economic and political success.

We have been accused of acts of which we are not guilty, and the talks with these delegations gave us an opportunity to create a better understanding, and to give them a clearer idea of our economic position and our neutrality.

It was a matter of "give and take", and we only gave way to demands which were in accordance with our neutrality. The direct trade with Germany was already reduced to such a level that it was hardly worth mentioning.

As regards the transport through Switzerland of coal and iron for Italy, we had a good reason for stopping this, as it did not seem logical to allow such transports through our country when these very badly needed raw materials were denied to us.

All German bank accounts in Switzerland were blocked and are being investigated.

We are happy to say that we have been granted a considerable quantity of foodstuffs and, what is even more important, deliveries of industrial raw materials. The Allies will also assist us as much as possible by granting transport facilities through France for our imports and exports."

.....

THE GREAT SWISS ALPINE TUNNELS. ST. GOTTHARD, SIMPLON & LOETSCHBERG.

In these days, when the strategic value of the St. Gotthard and Simplon tunnels in Switzerland is so often discussed by the international press, a review of the history and features of these great passageways which pierce Nature's mighty ramparts between the North and South may be timely.

The history of the St. Gotthard dates back to the early Middle Ages. Originally there was merely a narrow trail, but in order to facilitate commercial transactions between the cities on either side of the mountain it was gradually widened into a regular path for mules. This was the beginning of its fame.

In the 14th century the pass was already considered to be the main route for the transportation of merchandise from Basle, Zurich and Lucerne to the rich districts of Lombardy. It also was much frequented by travellers in general.

The St. Gotthard saw no further improvements until 1707, when a 73-yard-long tunnel was blasted through the base of the Kilchberg near Andermatt. It became known as the Urnerloch and helped to make crossings easier. Finally, in 1830, construction of the present highway was begun. Twelve years later a daily service with a horsedrawn diligence accommodating eight passengers was inaugurated. In due time this service was taken over and operated by the Federal Department of Posts and Railroads. Several decades ago horse-drawn coaches gave way to modern buses.

More and more the necessity for swifter and better transit between the North and South became apparent. The earliest plans for a Swiss Alpine railway date back to 1838, when engineer La Nicca examined the Splügen and Lukmanier passes for this purpose. However, his plans did not materialize and in 1852 another engineer, Koller by name, advanced the first project for the St. Gotthard. He had the support of chief engineer Lucchini. Five years later came the first projects for a Simplon tunnel and soon after there was a discussion in Berno regarding a Grimsel railway.

But in view of the central location of the St. Gotthard all other plans were finally abandoned, especially when Germany and Italy, who were equally interested in a tunnel project, also decided in favor of the St. Gotthard. After a series of conferences a treaty was signed by these three countries in 1871, and a total building appropriation of 119 million Swiss Francs was provided.

Boring of the St. Gotthard tunnel was begun at both ends in the summer of 1872, and on February 29, 1880, the workmen met and shook hands in the centre. An average of 2,500 workmen was employed daily and at times the number rose to 3,400.

Running from Göschenen to Airolo, the tunnel is slightly over $9\frac{1}{4}$ miles long. The double-track tunnel is 28 feet wide and 21 feet high.

Chief engineer of this huge project was Louis Favre of Geneva. However, fate denied him the satisfaction of witnessing its full completion. On July 19, 1879, Favre suddenly died of heart failure while on an inspection tour in the tunnel. Already on December 23, 1881, the first train passed through the tunnel and on May 23, 1882, the formal inauguration took place.

A new and glorious era now began for the St. Gotthard. From its beginning the railway became world famous for the beautiful scenery through which it passes and for the astonishing technical features which it boasts. Already the following year the second track provided for in the tunnel had to be laid.

Still another triumph was in store for the St. Gotthard railway when by 1924 the entire line from Basle to Chiasso, together with the branch line from Zurich, was electrified. Fast express trains pass through the St. Gotthard tunnel in 12 minutes.

While the St. Gotthard tunnel pierces the Alps in a straight line from north to south, the Simplon tunnel follows a northwest-southeast direction. The Simplon route thus is a vital link between France and Italy, and is by means of the Lötschberg railway, inaugurated in 1913, also of importance to northern Europe. In normal times the daily "Simplon-Orient" Express, with sleepers from Calais and Paris, travelled to Trieste, Belgrade, Sofia, Athens, Bucarest and Istanbul.

The Simplon Pass dates back to the Roman era. However, after the decline of the Roman empire the road was not used for many centuries. A revival of traffic took effect only in 1250 A.D. when a trade agreement was signed between the Bishop of Sion and a commercial house in Milan, stipulating that the old path across the Simplon should serve as the connection.

Once more the Simplon Pass would have become forgotten had it not been for Kaspar Stockalper, merchant prince and philanthropist of Brig.

Napoleon Bonaparte developed the primitive Simplon trail into a modern highway from 1800-1805. While he had also planned to build a large Hospice on the summit, fate prevented him from completing the project.

Various plans for the piercing of the Alps under the Monte Leone mountain group in the realm of the Simplon, were under consideration for several decades before a definite project could be worked out. Finally, after a satisfactory agreement had been concluded with Italy, construction of the Simplon tunnel was started in the Fall of 1898. On February 24, 1905 the workers from both ends met on May 19, 1906 the inauguration took place. The total cost of construction amounted to 100 million S. Frs.

The Simplon tunnel between Brig, in the Swiss Rhone valley, and Isello, in Italy, is the world's longest tunnel. It is 12 miles and 537 yards long.

The Simplon is the lowest great Alpine tunnel, its highest elevation being only 2,313 feet. Unlike the St. Gotthard, which is a wider bore with double tracks throughout, the Simplon was built with two galleries, 56 feet apart, connected by cross shafts every 220 yards. At first just one gallery was finished and one single track laid. The second gallery was completed in 1922. Electric traction was used in the Simplon tunnel from the start.

During the boring of the Simplon tunnel only 42 lives were lost, while 177 workmen died during the St. Gotthard tunnel construction. The course of the Simplon line from Vallorbe to Lausanne, along the lake of Geneva and up the Rhone valley, spells scenic enchantment throughout.

Connecting Goppenstein in the Valais, with Kandersteg in the Bernese Oberland, the Loetschberg tunnel, piercing the Bernese Alps, is the third longest in Switzerland, measuring 9 miles, 140 yards. Construction of this tunnel was started on October 15, 1906, with the actual piercing taking place on March 31, 1911. On July 15, 1913 the Loetschberg railway was formally inaugurated. It starts at Spiez, on the lake of Thun, has immediate connections with Bern and Interlaken and has been operated electrically from the start.

The Loetschberg railway is noted for the glorious scenery it traverses. Interesting in the Valais section are the impressive avalanche galleries and other protective measures against avalanches, a feature which may also be observed in certain parts of the St. Gotthard railway.

The great Swiss Alpine tunnels were built in an era of peace. They were intended to promote international trade and travel, bringing the nations of Europe into swifter contact with each other.

.

SWISS STUDY NEW LABOR POSSIBILITIES FOR POSTWAR PERIOD.

The Swiss government, in the framework of a vast programme destined for the creation of new labor possibilities for the postwar period, has carefully examined the problems of the future of our export trade which is one of the essential parts in the development of our country's economy. The government is studying a better functioning and the facilitation of the financing of our exports although it admits that the present system of clearing will still remain in force for the time being. It is well known how liberal the Swiss authorities are in all questions concerning advances in clearing. If this policy has secured our factories a normal activity during this war, it has also made our country a creditor to states whose financial situation at the moment is distinctly precarious. Therefore, the government will have to stimulate the activity of our foreign trade through an extension of its guarantees against the risk of exportation. State intervention in the financing of exports is essential for the development of this branch. The various export enterprises could cede the Federal guarantees to their banks as securities for advances they receive. The Swiss exporter will thus avoid long immobilization of capital due to the slow functioning of clearing, and the accelerated circulation of money on the other hand will again help to stimulate purchases abroad. Thus, practically everything will have been done in Switzerland to further our export trade. The quality of our products, the qualification of our workers and the far-sightedness of our industrial circles are naturally also favorable factors.