

Rail and road traffic in the Swiss mountains [continued]

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quality. By distillation, certain liquid and volatile substances are separated from other non-volatile constituents of the "wash", the former being first converted into vapour and then restored to a liquid state by cooling. It is in this way that the distillate is obtained, with its ethereal oils which give the final product its aroma and taste. Kirsch is distilled to an alcohol content of not more than 60 per cent. by volume, and is consumed at a strength between 41 and 48 per cent. by volume. The storage of kirsch is another factor of importance to its quality. The longer it is stored, the more are its aromatizing and flavouring constituents refined and perfected. For this reason only old kirsch, i.e., kirsch that has been stored for many years, is released for export. And all these various factors serve to explain why Switzerland's superb kirsch is so popular abroad.

The uses of kirsch are most highly diversified. Kirsch, drunk neat, is a sheer delight. A coffee with kirsch after every meal is beneficial and a source of great enjoyment. To know this old Swiss speciality is to love it. Kirsch is an indispensable "chaser" for fondue; it is advisable to drink a small glass of it with and immediately after a fondue. Kirsch is also excellent when added to vermouth, to which it gives that bitter-sweet bouquet that is so popular. A vermouth-kirsch is an aperitif to satisfy the taste of the most fastidious. Cocktails are always mixed from a variety of liquids, and Swiss kirsch is the ingredient that determines the quality of such cocktails as cream-kirsch, omnibus, Swiss dream skiwasser, kirsch-fizz, rose, and Ostende. Kirsch is largely used in the sweet and patisserie trade: kirsch flans, fruit cake, kirsch-flavoured filled chocolates, kirsch-flavoured tablet chocolate, coupe au kirsch, and kirsch ices, are just a few specialities. Finally, kirsch is also used in the production of fine liqueurs such as cherry brandy, creme de kirsch, and kirsch egg-nog.

Drink Swiss kirsch, a natural product with a splendid flavour all its own. It is issued only with the official token of genuineness which is your guarantee of unsurpassed quality.

RAIL AND ROAD TRAFFIC IN THE SWISS MOUNTAINS

By H. O. ERNST, Manager, London Office, Swiss National Tourist Office and Swiss Federal Railways.

(Continued from last issue.)

The winter season's first traffic handicap is dense mist, followed later by frost and snow. Each presents its own problem. Fog will reduce visibility to less than a few yards and deaden sound. Special care is therefore required in shunting yards where accidents and great delays are not infrequent. Often frost adds to the difficulty by rendering brakes less effective. Snow in small quantities will not seriously interfere with railway operations provided track points are kept free and in working order. The latest type of electrically operated points are now provided with heating elements. Salt is not used, as it creates rust. A naked flame is also inadvisable for defrosting electrically operated gear, as it is likely to burn through the cables. In the stations snow can be cleared by means of brooms or hand-operated snow ploughs. Falls to the depth of three to four feet in twelve hours are, however, often met with, even in the lowlands, and call for a sustained effort to keep trains running. Of first importance is a sufficient number of additional workers for the task of snow clearing. This is where the emergency staff rota I mentioned earlier comes into operation. As a first task, points and signal installations have to be cleared and put back into working order. In the meantime Motive Power will have made arrangements to free the line itself by running a wedge-shaped snow plough or, if necessary, a powerful rotary snow sweeper pushed by an electric locomotive. Other workers will also shake the snow from telephone and telegraph wires or, if broken by the weight of snow, repair them. Speed is important in order to avoid late trains and ensure the prompt delivery of goods.

Earlier I mentioned the Gotthard Line, the main international rail highway through Switzerland from north to south. Between the shores of Lake Lucerne and Goschenen at the entrance of the main tunnel, a distance of 24 miles, there is a difference of altitude of 2172 feet. On the north side, the track runs more or less parallel with the river Reuss, partly in the open, partly in tunnels. Elaborate precautions are taken throughout the year to protect the track against falling rock and in the winter against avalanches. Rock faces become unsafe through erosion by frost. Especially after the spring thaws and periodically throughout the year, likely spots are examined and made safe. When it rains in the lowlands, it snows in the mountains. Therefore the likelihood of severe frost and heavy falls of snow increases as the line gains altitude. At Goschenen depths of several metres are not uncommon. On such occasions up to a hundred extra men are needed to clear the station and keep the line open. Avalanches do occur every winter in the Reuss Valley, but the Gotthard Railway and the road are so well protected by stone and wood barriers placed at strategic points that the masses of snow seldom reach the traffic

lanes. For the same purpose pine trees are planted across gullies and dangerous slopes. These forests are protected by law, and to fell a tree is a serious offence.

The only narrow gauge line owned and operated by the Swiss Federal Railways runs from Lucerne over the Brunig to Interlaken via Meiringen and Brienz. As its culminating point lies at an altitude of 3314 feet, it can for our purpose be classified as a mountain railway. I mention this line to show that in this case the configuration of the terrain it serves, and not the altitude alone, is responsible for avalanche disasters. The whole of the mountain trace—roughly between Sarnen and Meiringen—is fairly free from this danger. The vulnerable area lies between Brienz and Interlaken at the level of Lake Brienz (1873ft), where the lateral valleys and gullies from the steep Breinzer-Grat collect masses of drift snow. Avalanches are not uncommon in this region, and in March, 1945, the line was cut and covered with snow and debris to the depth of five metres or about 15 feet.

(To be continued.)

DEATH OF WORLD-FAMOUS DESIGNER

It is not quite two years since the announcement was made that Robert Piguet was closing down his fashion house at the Rond-Point in the Champs-Elysees and was leaving Paris to return to his native land. He did not have long, however, to enjoy his retirement, for he recently died at the age of 55 years in Lausanne, where he was undergoing treatment. A native of Switzerland, born and brought up there, Piguet, who learnt his profession from those two great figures of haute couture, Paul Poiret and Lucien Lelong, did not only make a name for himself in the capital of elegance but also won world-wide fame. It has been said of his models that they were essentially Parisian because of their very feminine, discrete and distinctive elegance; and of himself it has even been said that he was the most Parisian of couturiers. And yet he remained faithful to Switzerland. To him we owe the idea of the Fashion Salon at the Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich in 1939. He always favoured the products of the Swiss textile industries. As he was the first Swiss to achieve world-wide fame in haute couture, all of his compatriots who are either remotely or closely connected with the fields of fashion and textiles will always have a warm memory of this sensitive and extremely gifted artist who did not let himself be spoiled by his great success and who never for a moment forget his origins.

NOTICE TO INTENDING TRAVELLERS

Due to the difficulties experienced in the past by Swiss nationals who have travelled away from New Zealand, and who subsequently have wished to return, it is thought desirable to draw the attention of all intending travellers to the fact that before leaving New Zealand they should make application to a Collector of Customs for a Certificate of Registration authorising their readmission to New Zealand. The procedure is for the travellers to produce their passport with two photographs of passport size and complete a written application. The period of validity of the certificate granted is shown on the face of the certificate, and the holder is permitted to return to New Zealand provided that on arrival back at a New Zealand port they establish their identity and the certificate is still valid.

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