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TICINESE MOSAIC

Navigation on the Lakes of the Ticino

Seen through the eyes of transportation experts, the Lago Maggiore has always played a special role. Its waters fill the valleys into which the all-important trade routes from the St. Gotthard and Simplon merge on their way to the cities in the plains of the Po. Thus steamship traffic conquered this lake relatively early: on February 15, 1826, only three years after steamships began operating on Lake Geneva and more than ten years before the same happened on Lake Lucerne. The first steamship, the wooden "Verbano", was launched in Locarno and took up service between Sesto Calende and Magadino. Now followed many years of trials and tribulations. World War II played havoc with the lake fleet, several steamers were sunk and traffic across the border became impossible. Switzerland was forced to operate her own boats, and one of the first was bought in Lugano and transported overland across the Monte Ceneri to Locarno, where it took up service between Locarno, Magadino, Gambarogno, Brissago. Today the navigation on Lago Maggiore is in Italian hands—the Gestione Governative NLM, based in Milan. Switzerland's interests are protected by binding agreements and in the Ticinese part of the lake there are, for example, year-round courses connecting Locarno with the Gambarogno region and the Brissago Isles and town.

Lake Lugano shares much of the favourable traffic situation created by the St. Gotthard line with Lago Maggiore and Lake Lucerne. Year-round navigation is also necessary for many lakeside towns and villages. It was the opening of the St. Gotthard line that brought major traffic into the region of the lake. This in turn led to the founding of SNL (Societa Navigazione e Ferrovie per il Lago di Lugano) in 1881, which at one time ran a dozen boats as well as two narrow-gauge railways, one to Lake Como, the other to Lago Maggiore.

For many years this fleet consisted of the typical single-deck paddle-wheelers built especially low because they had to negotiate the bridge of the dam at Melide. Today, however, the romantic paddle-wheelers are gone, replaced by sleek, diesel boats.

Trade Route: St. Gotthard

Even before the opening of the St. Gotthard railroad, traffic across the pass—probably used for the first time by the Romans—was fairly heavy. In 1876, for instance, 69,547 people traversed the famous mountain by postal coach. In the spring hundreds of Italians crossed it to find work in Germany, Holland, England and France. In the fall scores of merchants flocked to the Ticino to the famous trade fair of Lugano. To these must be added tourists and pilgrims on their way to the sunny south. Later, though, came the steam engines of the railroad and for a while it grew quiet on the lofty summit; the stage coaches were moved to museums. But the transition from road to rail, from "across" to "through" the mountain, extorted a high price. The construction of the

tunnel was not an easy task and the man who led it—an engineer from Geneva, Louis Favre—died in the tunnel, together with more than 170 of his workers.

When in 1872 the construction of the tunnel called for tenders, Louis Favre outbid six rivals and signed the contract on August 17. Construction started in the fall of the same year. Eight years later, on February 29, 1880, the two crews from each side of the mountain met almost exactly in the middle. The ones from the north had "done" 7145 metres, those from the south 7155 metres. The work of their engineers had been precise and the difference of the two axes was merely 35 cm horizontally and 5 cm in height! When in 1882 the line was officially opened it was the world's longest tunnel. Later much was added: a second track was laid, more tunnels were built and, in 1917-1922, the railway from Erstfeld to Bellinzona was electrified. In 1954 the socalled "rolling highway" was introduced, special trains transporting cars through the mountain when snows block their passage across the pass, more than 450,000 per year. Today there are more than 300 trains per day using the tunnel. But even this is no longer enough, and already the construction of a road tunnel is in progress—again to be the longest in the world.

Bosco-Gurin, German-speaking Ticinese Village

At an altitude of 4500 ft., protected against avalanches by a wooded slope, lies the village of Bosco-Gurin, whose inhabitants still speak German in a canton whose official language is Italian. Around the year 1200 numerous families from the German-speaking part of the Valais began to emigrate across the Alps into the high valleys of Italy, the Ticino and the Grisons. One group of these people—they were to become known as "Walser"—on their wanderings in search of new land came across the Guriner Furka into the highest part of the Bosco Valley. Old documents of the Walser confirm their presence as early as 1244 and mention the construction of a church in 1253. With their original language the people of Bosco (Italian) or Gurin (German) have also retained much of their culture and customs. The house types, for instance, are those of the Valais, only the church is Ticinese. Life is not easy at these heights, spring comes late and October brings snow.

Hermann Hesse—Nobel Prizewinner

Many writers, sculptors and painters have found their second home in the Ticino. Here in the sunny, mild south and yet close to the mountains they have found peace and happiness. A famous writer and poet who did just that was the Nobel prizewinner Hermann Hesse.

He was born in 1877 in Calw (Germany) as the son of a missionary family. "Ever since I was thirteen," he is said to have once written, "I wanted to become a poet or nothing at all." He wrote a series of novels and travel sketches, and his collected poems appeared in 1942. Four years later he was awarded the Nobel prize for literature for his works. Hermann Hesse lived in Montagnola in a large red house from 1919 and became a Swiss citizen in 1921. He felt at home here, and many of his works mirror the beautiful surroundings and landscapes of his chosen

and beloved Ticino. It was also here that the writer and poet wished to find, and found, his final resting place. He died on August 9, 1962.

Historic Dates

15 B.C.: Romans conquer the Ticino.
590 A.D.: Franks take over.
900-1000: Rule of the bishops of Como.
1331: First invasion by the Swiss Confederates.
1403: The Livino Valley requests the protection of the people of Uri and Nidwalden.

1422: The Visconti of Milan take Bellinzona and the upper valleys and build the fortresses of Bellinzona.
1500: Bellinzona becomes Swiss, followed in 1512 by Lugano and in 1513 by Locarno.

1789: Lugano declares its independence.
1803: The Ticino becomes the 18th Swiss canton.
1872: Start of the construction of the St. Gotthard line.
1878: Bellinzona becomes the Ticinese capital.
1882: Opening of the St. Gotthard line.

International Wire Exhibition

The Fourth International Wire Exhibition will be held in Basle (Switzerland) from June 25 to 29, 1974. "Wire 74", in which over 160 firms from 15 countries will be taking part, will considerably exceed in importance and size the 1972 exhibition, which met with such great success. "Wire 72", the biggest international wire exhibition ever organised so far, was attended by nearly 10,000 visitors directly interested in the production and use of wire. The Fourth International Wire Exhibition will be displaying an even wider choice of exhibits and will fill six exhibition halls at the Basle Fair, instead of three as in 1972.—(SODT).

Pre-Cast Concrete Walls

A few months ago, the "Piz Badura" pre-cast concrete elements developed by a Wadenswil engineer (Zurich, Switzerland) were used for the first time on a building site in an Alpine valley in the Grisons. These elements (dimensions): 120 x 120 x 70 cm), which can be laid extremely quickly, offer a rational method of erecting protective walls for roads, dams, dikes and breakwaters, avalanche breaks etc. The elements are secured together by small steel trusses and can be used for top work; they resist a lateral pressure of 50 tons. In addition, they possess the advantage of being easy to move and re-use elsewhere, when widening a road for example.—(SODT).