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THE WORLD OF THE ALPS

For a distance of roughly 800 miles the Alps — the world's most densely populated and most widely explored mountain system — stretch in a sweeping curve from the Gulf of Genoa to Vienna, marching peak upon peak between the plains of northern Italy and southern Germany. Their highest summits and steepest walls — there are, for instance, in Switzerland alone, more than one thousand glaciers measuring a total of some 2000 square kilometers — are a world that belong to the clouds, the winds, the ice and snow — and to a few hardy plants and animals.

Man, here, among the tallest peaks and most rugged cliffs, is an outsider and not the central point of creation. This large mountain chain with hundreds of distinct summits, jagged crags, dozens of ranges and deep valleys is usually divided into three main groups: the Western Alps, extending from the Col du Tenda to the Simplon Pass; the Central Alps from the Simplon Pass to the Passo di Resia (Reschen-Scheideck); and the Eastern Alps from the Reschen-Schiedeck to the Radstadter Tauern route, a group that also includes the higher summits of the south-eastern Alps. These systems are again subdivided into a total of 18 smaller groups—five in the Western Alps, seven in the Central Alps (these include all the great ranges in Switzerland such as the Bernese Alps, Lepontine Alps, Todi Range, Glarus Alps, Bernina Alps, the Albula Range and the Silvretta Range), and six in the Eastern Alps, a part of which are the famous climbing mountains of the Dolomites.

The Alps, despite their bulwark-like and majestic appearance, never formed an impassable barrier for man. And if Neanderthal Man is said to have lived at a height of over 7500 feet, one may assume that man also traveled at these altitudes after the Last Ice Age, especially as many of the deperessions or breaks in the chains are much lower than that.

It was undoubtedly the early native inhabitants of the mountains—hunters and herdsmen—who first used these passes, and there is evidence of roads that existed long before Roman times. But to the outside world they first became known when the Romans crossed them to conquer the regions that lay beyond. Most historians seem to agree that the Romans did not know or use very many crossings, but they certainly used the following: the Col de l'Agentiere, the Col de Venevre (by most chroniclers considered the pass which Hannibal crossed with his army and famous elephants in the year 218 B.C.), the two St. Bernard passes, the Splugen, the Septimer, the Brenner, the Radstadter Tauern, the Solkscharte and the Plocken. Of all these the Brenner and the Col de Genevre were probably the most frequented.

Later, over the years, all the other well-known passes, such as the Simplon, St. Gotthard, Lukmanier, San Bernardino or Umbrail, were developed and a few, like the Semmering, the Brenner and the Arlberg, even had carriage roads before the year 1800. But the time when most of the roads across the great Alpine passes were constructed or enlarged to make room for carriages, and later for cars, was the 19th century, not least because of the impetus given by Napoleon. (He crossed the

Great St. Bernhard in 1800 with some 40,000 men.)

Then, by the mid-20th century, there were already railway lines leading over or through the great mountain chain, followed—only a few years ago—by road tunnels.

Man thus has known the mountains for a long, long time. At first he feared them and talked of monsters and vicious dwarfs living in their wildest parts, and tales of bears, wolves and lynxes were still common even a hundred years ago. But then, slowly and at first falteringly, he began to admire the beauty and grandeur of this majestic, silent world. Soon, he longed to climb the peaks and rocky walls, to explore the ice-fields and to pit his strength and endurance against them, to conquer their world or at least to become part of it, if only for a short while. The reasons behind this were — and still are — manifold and the question: “Why does man want to climb mountains?” has been asked and answered many times. At first, mountain-climbers — chiefly naturalists like Konrod Gesner, the Meyer family of Aarau, von Haller of Berne, Rohrdorf, Hugi, Saussure, and many others — gave scientific reasons and conducted studies and experiments once they reached the summits, or when they did not were likely to be called “crazy”. But later, when mountaineering as we know it today began, this was no longer necessary and a man could admit that he climbed mountains “because they were there”, “for the love of them”, “for their beauty and stillness”, “for his own personal satisfaction” or for whatever reason he wanted to give.

And today, when the word “impossible” no longer exists in mountaineering, thanks to ever newer and better equipment and techniques in rock and ice climbing, each of those daring specialists probably still has his or her own answer to the question, even though he or she may not be able to put it into so many words. But one thing they all have in common, even with those who “only” hike in the lower regions of the mountains, or those who make use of the many mechanical contraptions designed to whisk them to the summits: they find relaxation and peace from the stress of the hectic life in the cities.

They find “themselves” again, forget their small troubles and worries among the grandeur of the peaks of that great mountain chain, the Alps, that curve from the Gulf of Genoa to the Valley of the Danube at the gates of Vienna.

F.W.

Swiss Plant for the Foodstuffs and Chemical Industries

A machinery factory at Rheinfelden (Schaffhausen—Switzerland) has designed a new plant for the manufacture of viscous or thick liquids for the pharmaceutical, cosmetics and foodstuffs industries; this plant is ideal, for example, for the preparation of emulsions, creams, ointments, toothpaste, mayonnaise, sauces, etc. The perfectly homogenous and deaerated finished product is ready for processing. The new feature