

The Matterhorn climb

Autor(en): **Schmidt, Walter**

Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): **- (1931)**

Heft 512

PDF erstellt am: **27.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-694546>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Inhalten der Zeitschriften. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern.

Die auf der Plattform e-periodica veröffentlichten Dokumente stehen für nicht-kommerzielle Zwecke in Lehre und Forschung sowie für die private Nutzung frei zur Verfügung. Einzelne Dateien oder Ausdrucke aus diesem Angebot können zusammen mit diesen Nutzungsbedingungen und den korrekten Herkunftsbezeichnungen weitergegeben werden.

Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. Die systematische Speicherung von Teilen des elektronischen Angebots auf anderen Servern bedarf ebenfalls des schriftlichen Einverständnisses der Rechteinhaber.

Haftungsausschluss

Alle Angaben erfolgen ohne Gewähr für Vollständigkeit oder Richtigkeit. Es wird keine Haftung übernommen für Schäden durch die Verwendung von Informationen aus diesem Online-Angebot oder durch das Fehlen von Informationen. Dies gilt auch für Inhalte Dritter, die über dieses Angebot zugänglich sind.

there is the Nydeck Bridge which leads to the Bear Pit. Here the bears of Berne are alive and well, living that pampered life that municipal ownership brings.

Returning over the bridge and up the Kramgasse one passes the Zytlogge, or West Gate of Berne. This marks the end of the Kramgasse. It is a fine tower of the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, surmounted by a clock which strikes the quarters. Just before the bronze figure at the top of the tower strikes the hours a cock crows. Then a little man turns an hour-glass, and from the tower a procession of bears and knights pass in and out of two doorways.

The old town stands sturdily on its elevated peninsula, set 1,788 feet above sea-level, and all round the peninsula rush the green-blue glacier waters of the Aar. The long, delightful, irregular streets which stripe the peninsula from top to bottom, are ancient and modern at the same time. The Bundesplatz is a large open space surrounded by buildings which are all in keeping, with the one great exception; the Bundespalast, which offers a poor contrast to the old Rathaus, and whose three domes are an unfortunate eyesore. But the beauty of Berne is the market, which stretches down from there through the Barenplatz to the Waisenhausplatz.

There is romance in the names of Rhine and Rhone, the twins which are born in the same lap, but carve their own roads of fame. At Basle Switzerland parts with her now enormous offspring, and although other routes of entry into the Alps have been hewn out of solid rock, the waterway is the oldest and most romantic.

The Swiss Government has made unceasing efforts to encourage shipping on the Rhine, and Basle has thus become one of the chief ports on the river. By reason of its favourable position on the borders of France, Basle has become a centre of European commerce, the chief railway and air lines centre on this town, and if it were not for the mountainous nature of Switzerland and the impossibility of navigation over the Swiss portion, the river would be the great highway across Europe.

Basle is situated at an altitude of 900 feet above the sea, with close proximity to the Jura and the Alps, the Vosges and the Black Forest. The best way to approach this city is on foot. Enter by the Mittlere Brücke, or Middle Bridge, or come in through the old streets until you are standing on the cathedral terrace overlooking the Rhine and its bridges and quays. Beautiful gardens and green surroundings lend the approaches the appearance of a domain, so that by the time you reach the town hall you are at home.

From the terrace you can see the mighty river below, where it first rejoices in its freedom from compression of the great cliffs which confine it all the way from Schaffhausen, but here it enters on its commercial career as a highway for great ships.

The Jura mountains are not so high as the average ranges. They are a fine range of limestone crests, running along the northwest border of the country, and stretching into the Italian-speaking canton of Ticino, whereas the Alps proper, with their glaciers and snowfields, occupy more than half the total area of the whole country. The Alps are the giants of the ranges, but they are surrounded by a girdle of lesser heights which command splendid views of the great elevations from almost every peak, distance and angle. The lesser heights are undulating and richly wooded in a manner that the more frigid altitudes will not sustain; they will also support an amount of cultivation unknown at the practically uninhabited higher points. This part is dotted with many interesting towns of mediæval character, and the temperature is as unlike the average Swiss conditions as it is possible for it to be.

The country traversed on the way to Zurich lacks none of the details recounted in the foregoing pages. Zurich is the headquarters of Eastern Switzerland, and it includes broad reaches of rolling country and many industrial districts, which do not obtrude themselves on the landscape by reason of smoke pollution, as this is entirely absent owing to a highly-efficient electrical system in use all over the country. The Santis and Todi are the Alpine districts of this canton, the latter surpasses the former in scenery, and it is one of extraordinary grandeur, and little known, except to mountaineers.

The city of Zurich has a population of close on 250,000 inhabitants; it is the largest in the country, favoured on one hand by its industrial importance, and on the other by its position on the edge of Lake Zurich. The old parts of the town are the most interesting, built, as they are, on both sides of the River Limmat, round the three famous churches of St. Peter's, Fraumünster, and Grossmünster. The view across the lake, with its busy steamer traffic and background of snowy mountains, is very charming. A better view is obtained if you ascend about 2,050 feet above the town of the Dolder, and, better still, from the Uetliberg, another 805 feet up. Most of this ascent can be done by the cable railway from the town. Similar vistas are obtainable from the Rigi and Zurichberg, which can be reached by funicular. Both these mountains

afford a sweeping view as far as the Alps in the South, and north to the Rhine.

A walk through the town from the station to the lake will convince you that Zurich is a city of importance; the rows of fine covered-in shops and stately buildings give an impression of wealth that is hard to dispel. The shores of the lake are studded with busy, industrious villages, most of them bearing a peculiar resemblance to little German hamlets, which they practically are.

The whole confederation of twenty-two states, known as cantons, three of which are sub-divided in half-cantons, make up the republic of Switzerland. The language of the major part of the people is German, and that is also the official language. Next comes French, and then Italian. About 43,000 people speak what is known as Romansch, a dialect allied to Latin; this is only spoken in certain districts in the Grisons, whereas German is spoken almost everywhere. The Romansch tongue is also supposed to be of Rhaetian origin. There is a patriotic effort afoot to preserve this speech, similar to the Gaelic revival in Ireland, though it is likely to meet with greater opposition. Some of the most enthusiastic scholars have discovered that it has a grammar which can be taught in the schools. This is a new discovery, but sufficient to kill any language. The people of Graubünden in the Grisons take great pride in their descent from the tribe of Rhaetians, which was subjugated by Rome about 15 A.D. The country is full of legends of Roman days.

The railway, following its narrow, canyonlike valley, winds in and out as it climbs toward the summit of the range, burrowing through mountains until, for an hour or two near the top, you are underground half the time, roaring through inky tunnels. Far below on the high road wooded slopes twist themselves about tiny farms, and skirt little red-roofed villas and then lose themselves in the forests. Valleys clothed in sombre firs open off the permanent way and disappear between folds in the mountains. Emerging from the bowels of the earth you come to a pause on the topmost ridge where the wooded slope, cradling a thriving town, falls sharply away below you. Here one of the engines is detached and you coast down the tumbling mountain into a pleasant rolling country of prosperous farms and great stretches of sable woods.

The villagers live close together and farm principally on the mountains. Here I learnt the meaning of the word "alp," though I have since discovered that it is a piece of knowledge shared by the authoress of "The Constant Nymph." *Alp* does not mean a rocky mountain peak, but a mountain field, and often owned jointly by several people. In July and August the farmers go to their little huts on their *alps*, and cut hay, make cheese, or pasture their cattle. They transport the hay and cheese on little wagons, often mandrawn, but usually pulled by cows.

One of the most delightful sights of this range is the morning procession of goats gathered by the herd with a goat-horn. He pastures them during the day and at twilight collects them by a few notes on his horn and takes them home again.

Alexander Jacob Reynolds.
The Scottish Field.

"HERO" Brand

This famous Swiss pack of

**STRAWBERRIES
RASPBERRIES
CHERRIES
VEGETABLES
BLACK CHERRY JAM**
etc.

is stocked by all leading
High-Class Stores



Should you have
any difficulty in
obtaining supplies
please write to

"HERO"
ASTOR HOUSE
ALDWYCH
LONDON,
W.C.2

THE MATTERHORN CLIMB.

The climber who wishes to ascend the Matterhorn in the tracks of its conquerors, Edward Whymper and Leslie Stephen, must take his time; it does not do to rush from the railway station at Zermatt to the fruit shop and the general store and then to throw oneself impatiently at the mountain. He should pass a quiet afternoon at Zermatt, spend a fine evening along some byway, and reserve a room in a hotel having a south window, through which the "Lion of Zermatt" may look uninterruptedly the entire night. He thereby creates for himself a certain psychological preparation for his forthcoming feat of endurance. Personally I was not lucky enough to get a room with a south window, but before turning in I did not fail to cast a last glance on the stupendous mountain, peacefully illuminated by the pale light of the moon.

The next morning large drops of rain commenced to fall from a lightly-clouded sky. But, though I, this kind of weather soon changes and sunshine will follow, as I packed my things and commenced to climb.

At a height of 9,842 ft. there is a hotel, built and maintained by the Municipality of Zermatt, and next to it a hut of the Swiss Alpine Club. There I met my guide, just at the moment when the last rays of the setting sun were falling on the high Alpine range. Thereafter, the whole panorama became wrapped in the mantle of starlit night, points of light glimmered in the valley, and the full moon rose to complete the wonderful scene. And we slept cheek by jowl with the most imposing mountain in the world.

It seemed a pity that picks clanked and mountain boots clattered shortly after midnight; but, after all, we had not climbed so far just to sleep. There were, in all, five parties ready to set out; these went forward one after another into the dark, to embark on their attack on the Matterhorn.

The weather did not seem exactly propitious; a cold wind whistled over the edge and the stars were mostly concealed behind vapoury clouds. But as the sun commenced to animate the mountains and the eastern horizon became rippled with red, the diaphanous vapours were dissipated. A short distance above the present hut are the ruins of the old refuge, whence the path rises easily; one follows the ridge, deviating now and then a little to the left, soon to regain the outer edge of the ridge where there is no risk from falling rocks.

Half-way to the peak we find the Solvay refuge, where one may shelter in the event of change of weather, accidents, and nightfall, but where, under normal conditions, only a short stop is permitted. It is usual to remain here merely a few minutes because, in the meantime, day has dawned. The character of the ascent now completely alters, for whereas the climb from the Hôtel Belvedere to the Solvay refuge is chiefly over loose rock, there is now a short track over snow on the so-called "shoulder." Thick and strongly-secured ropes assist one along over the precipitous sections where, in 1865, four Matterhorn conquerors (Lord Douglas, the Rev. Hudson, Mr. Hadlow, and the guide, Michel Croz) lost their footing and fell over the precipice. After leaving the "shoulder" behind and standing at the foot of the defiant "roof" one must call a short halt and take a glance over the precipice, which falls vertically more than 3,000 ft. in a series of bare walls to the Matterhorn Glacier, the grave of Whymper's companions, where the yawning gaps have engulfed many an unfortunate. To be overtaken here by a thunderstorm, I thought, must be extremely unpleasant, and I bade my guide start the attack on the "roof." This makes little appeal to Alpine skill, but is a considerable tax on one's muscular strength. Strong ropes are suspended down the extraordinarily steep ridge and on epulls oneself up rapidly by this means, whilst the visitors at the Mont Cervin and Zermatt hotels amuse themselves through the telescope at our rope-dancing. At any rate, they had to get up early as it is only just six o'clock.

To stand on the most coveted peak of the high Alps inspires an overpowering sensation, and no one who has lost his heart to the mountains can withstand the call of this peak. This fact has been admitted by the foremost Alpinists of all times.

We did not remain at the top for long because a penetrating wind howled over the mountain and threatened to hurl us off the ridge. But we did not fail to observe the imposing view which is typical and unique in that everything to north, south, east, and west is imperiously dominated by the haughty mountain.

The Matterhorn trip, which took exactly seven hours from the hut to the peak and back, ended at the Schwarzsee (Black Lake). Here we lunched, with the gleaming white glaciers as neighbours the imposing Titan rising nearby in incomparable grandeur. We remained at its foot the whole afternoon and only descended when the light commenced to fade, sublimely conscious of an undying friendship made with the mountain of mountains.

"Sphere."

Walter Schmidt.