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E. Guérard: Aufstieg zum Grossen St. Bernhard, 1850

(By courtesy Swiss National Tourist Office)

SWITZERLAND'S TOURISM ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

A century ago, in 1863, British, French and German travellers were already undertaking what in those days was a long and uncomfortable trek in order to enjoy holidays in Switzerland, the attractions of which were well known by then. British visitors preferred the Valais, Lake Geneva and the Bernese Oberland, whereas the Germans tended to choose Central Switzerland and the Bernese Oberland. Holiday-makers were invariably foreigners and holidays were long-drawn-out affairs — " A diligent and observant traveller can see most places of interest in only four weeks . . . " said Baedeker. Places listed included Zurich, Lucerne with the Rigi and Pilatus, Interlaken and Grindelwald, Lauterbrunnen and Wengen, Zermatt and the Gornergrat and, of course, Montreux. Gais, Chur and Ragaz were recommended to those who could afford the time. Air, milk and grape cures were fashionable.

Having reached Switzerland, the visitor stayed there far longer than today — in fact about twenty times as long. Some three million overnight stops are calculated for 1863. Today the figure is in the region of thirty million; Baedeker paid tribute to the standard of accommodation: " Swiss inns " he wrote, " are perhaps the best in the world. It is hard to find a poor one throughout German- or French-speaking Switzerland ". Against this, travelling to holiday areas was difficult and time-consuming. Railways were " comfortable and well ventilated " but, as the Bailiff of the Bernese Grand Council reported in 1862, it was thought that they would eventually " rob small states of their independence ".

Rail communications ended at Chur and Lucerne, Thun and Sion. From there onwards horse-drawn diligences or hired carriages had to be used. A two-in-hand cost 25 francs per day, excluding tips and return journey. A midday pause of two to three hours was taken for granted. The postal authorities, responsible for passenger conveyance, issued regulations with no fewer than ninety clauses and maintained a variety of services, including express stage coaches, individual express coaches and normal diligences. " Porters and coachmen ", stated one of the regulations, " will at all times treat passengers with courtesy and consideration and will, in particular, refrain from drunkenness."

A hotel room cost 2 francs plus $\frac{3}{4}$ franc for light (i.e. candles) and service. A hearty Swiss breakfast cost 1.50 francs. Luncheon and dinner were taken at a long, communal table d'hote at set times and they cost between 3 and 4 francs without wine. Hoteliers and innkeepers were already facing the competition of the pension, where full board was obtainable at 4 to 8 francs per day, though admittedly only for longer stays. Pensions were particularly numerous around Lake Geneva. Interlaken had a choice of 13 hotels and inns (today the figure is 83), Lucerne offered 873 beds (today 6,000), St. Moritz was noted only as a spa, with " 44 wooden bathtubs ", Montreux had 2,000 beds available (today 4,700), whereas Davos had only two inns.

Pilatus and Rigi — highlights of the Victorian tour — were reached on horseback or by carrier-chair and the ascent cost respectively 10 or 20 francs. French currency (gold) was most readily accepted.

By 1863 the tourist trade already constituted a useful, though still hardly recognized, source of revenue for Switzerland. Except in the period between 1876 and 1891 tourism expanded steadily, especially before the first world war. Today the gross turnover is 2,800 million francs.

[S.N.T.O.]