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# The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED IN 1919 BY PAUL F. BOEHRINGER.

**The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain**

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## SWISS TRANSPORT FACILITIES

We once coined the slogan "from whip-crack to sonic bang". This about sums up the whole development of transport from mailcoach to jet aircraft. In terms of sound it expresses the whole social and technical evolution of the last 150 years. Young folk in their twenties today know the sound of a cracking horsewhip practically only from hearsay. Their parents and grandparents have witnessed the explosive leap into the atomic age. The beginning of this century meant the end of the pack-mule age of the ox-drawn plough and the horse-drawn farm cart, which had been an integral part of daily life for millenia. The fear of stepping into a mechanically propelled vehicle capable of speeds of 20 m.p.h., then 100 m.p.h., and finally 750 m.p.h., and more, is now a thing of the past. What was once a matter for the rough coachman accustomed to adventures *en route*, is now entrusted to an illuminated push-button, behind whose precision lies the work of universities and industrial research laboratories, and either operated by a technically-trained specialist or even controlled automatically. Scientific and technical progress have put a very wide choice of transport media at the disposal of the traveller, and opened up new destinations hitherto inaccessible. He has to adapt himself to them if he wishes to make use of them, since on his way to work and in his leisure time he has no alternative but to utilise the facilities provided.

### The Special Case of Touring in Switzerland

Switzerland had the good luck to acclimatise herself, gradually, and undisturbed, to this growing choice of means of transport over a century and a half. She was, as it were, prepared in advance, even though the promoters themselves still had no idea of the magnitude of the great revolution brought about by the "discovery" of the Alps by natural historians and poets, the invention of the steam locomotive, the construction of the mountain railways, the development of the motor-car and the aeroplane. Even before these modern innovations came about, Switzerland was already favoured by holidaymakers. All that was necessary was to extend and improve what was already to hand. This, however, was not merely a matter of building more hotels and restaurants. It is all too easily forgotten — and this is a problem facing the promotion of a tourist industry in the developing countries — what a great contribution to foreign tourism in Switzerland by the fact that it was a country of law and order, with security and safety forming a background of confidence. The life and property of the visitor were protected; freedom of speech and movement were guaranteed from the outset. When old traditions were threatened with extinction, when inherited land was appropriated, when foreign concerns invaded an unspoilt landscape, the local populations only followed the galloping pioneering spirit with reluctance

and by devious paths, with suspicion and often open ill-will, but they followed nevertheless. And thus the world-famous resorts were born.

It may well be said that tourism, spreading as it was in ever wider social circles, was just the very thing for the Swiss, a people whose hospitality had earned the praise of Montaigne centuries before. For Switzerland is the melting-pot of so many different currents of thought — the *liberty* of Rousseau, who hoped to cure the ills of society with his "back to nature" movement, the *educational ideas* of Pestalozzi, Fellenberg and Père Girard, which led to the introduction of elementary public education, the *feeling of unity* of the German, French and Italian-speaking sections of the population of the Federal State in 1848. It would be a grave error to imagine that tourism in Switzerland owed its origin to purely commercial motives. The urge to visit this land, with its exciting and varied scenery, this remarkable little republic (or rather confederation of democratic communities) in the heart of Europe, existed long before the advent of modern tourist propaganda. In 1848, a year marked both by the beginning of railway construction and the unification of legislation, the number of foreign visitors to Switzerland was estimated at 30-40,000. The railways then made it possible to meet this demand on a very large scale. We of today may well laugh at the standards of speed, comfort, cleanliness and safety which were the railways' pride a century ago. The mail-coaches took the railway passengers from the station through rough, dusty and dangerous mountain passes to the remotest Alpine valleys. There, enterprising men had provided accommodation by building hotels. That is how such world-famous resorts as St. Moritz, Davos, Arosa, the Rigi, Grindelwald, Wengen, Mürren, Zermatt, and so forth began their careers a hundred years ago. Some places, such as Arosa, St. Moritz, Lucerne and Montreux, increased in population many times over in the course of a few decades.

Enthusiasm for nature and sport struck democratic root on an ever broader basis, and so a public hitherto unaccustomed to travel were offered Cook's Tours and Baedeker's Guides. Alpine clubs in London, Vienna, Munich, and in Switzerland itself, as old as the resorts quoted, are not mere publicity organisations for the latter, but are rather intended to disseminate knowledge of the Alps and to facilitate access to them. Maps were issued, mountaineering huts built, rescue services organised. Next came touring associations for working-class people, and then, on the eve of the First World War, the "Wander-vögel" movement in Germany (a sort of young people's hiking and youth hostelling organisation). Last, but by no means least, were those who had been recommended to take long cures in the pure mountain air — the so-called climatic cures, milk cures, whey cures, strawberry

cures, the pine-needle baths, etc., administered to sick and convalescent visitors in bygone days.

Approach to the Alpine regions was via the ordinary railways. There the mountain railways become a great attraction, while the two, four and six-in-hand Alpine mail coaches still carried on into the last period of the "good old days", when there was still some idyllicism and romanticism left in the world. The development of public education in the 19th century was of great importance in the expansion of transport, providing as it did a supply of trained personnel to whom the exemplary running of the services was due. The visitor speaking German, French and Italian felt at home in any part of the Swiss Confederation. For many young and active people, service with the railways was the first step on the way up, just as was personal service to the visitors at the resorts, whether starting off as an obliging porter or as a knowledgeable mountain guide, or as a restaurateur or inn-keeper. The whole social evolution had a double effect — the spread of education in foreign countries created a desire to visit Switzerland, a country which had previously only catered for a selected élite, while the spread of education in Switzerland itself created the reserve of qualified employees needed to operate the transport systems and the tourist industry in general.

At the 1964 National Exhibition in Lausanne, it is not without significance that tourism was featured in the "Art de vivre" section rather than in the "Transport" or "Money & Exchanges" pavilions. This is symbolic of the way in which the Swiss have always viewed the tourist trade — it is the human element, the visitor himself, who occupies the centre of the stage — the individual as opposed to nature and technology. It is just this individual who is seeking to break away from the "madding crowd" and the hurly-burly of his daily working life to seek true rest and recreation in a change of scene and atmosphere. Thus, for the Swiss, touring is a human thing, and not just a matter of transportation technology or the country's business economy.

#### Rail Transport

In Switzerland, a country of free enterprise, the visitor or native traveller has, in addition to the nationally-owned undertakings, a wide choice of privately-financed transport media at his disposal. For a large fraction of the Swiss population, living as they do in a country with no great natural resources, the foreign tourist industry is a basic means of livelihood. In addition to the Swiss Federal Railways, operating over 1,800 miles of track, there is an even more extensive network of private lines, which cater largely for the tourist. It might well be said that such a large number of private undertakings — 33 standard-gauge railways, 44 light railways, 66 rack-and-pinion and funicular railways, over 150 cableways, and finally nearly 80 local transport systems (trams, buses and trolleybuses) — is excessive in these days of rationalisation and automation. Considered from a purely commercial point of view this is, of course, quite true. However, it should be borne in mind that in Switzerland public transport concerns are very closely linked with the life of the people. A high degree of co-ordination between all these undertakings is achieved by means of technical and financial assistance (i.e. subsidies) from the Federal Government. In actual fact, the so-called private railway companies are of the "mixed" variety, i.e. they lie partly within the private and public sectors, being controlled not only by private shareholders but also by local and cantonal governments. This dual control gives a wide circle of citizens cause for reflection about the relationship between trans-

port and tourism, and enables them to gain insight into the international aspects of transportation problems, thus making them responsible for the welfare of the community as a whole. The requirements of the foreign visitor as regards speed, comfort and safety are always considered by local, regional and national transport concerns, which means that the Swiss taxpayer has made sacrifices in the past and continues to make them in order to maintain these costly undertakings. This was demonstrated some time ago, when the direct railway connection between Lucerne and Engelberg cut down travelling time by a full hour and eliminated the need to change trains. This piece of modernisation cost the Confederation and the relatively poor mountain Cantons and districts 22 million Francs. The Swiss is attached to his railways, even when he has to make financial sacrifices for them. The same applies to the boat services on all the lakes from Geneva to Constance, and also over the other side of the Gotthard, in the lake district of Lugano and Locarno.

#### Air Transport

There has been an astonishing growth in the volume of air traffic to the country's three great international airports — Basle, Zurich and Geneva — both visiting and transit traffic. The backbone of Swiss air Transport is the national airline concern SWISSAIR. As well as the three great airports, there are over a dozen small airfields in the country, and alongside the regular airline services there has been a considerable increase in charter flying. We shall not delve here into statistics. In any case, when all the sport and tourist flights and gliding are taken into consideration, it will be realised how full of traffic is the Helvetic air, with its special attractions such as landing on glaciers, etc. Switzerland can thank air travel for having raised it from the level of a small inland country with no direct connections to the sea to that of a key point in intercontinental airline traffic.

#### Road Transport

Switzerland's first international highways originated with the expansion of the Roman Empire. The oldest alpine roads, dating back to before the birth of Our Lord, were the Great St. Bernard and the Simplon highways and those linking Milan, Como and Chiavenna with Chur and the valley of the Rhine via the Julier, Splügen and San Bernardino passes.

Wherever the Romans built metalled roads they did so with great technical skill. Outstanding examples of this were the Septimer and San Bernardino roads, which even today still show traces of Roman engineering.

The Romans pushed their roads forward from the Alps down into the foothills and lowlands beyond; one highway led from Geneva via Avenches to Augst and Windisch, and another from Chur along the Rhine to the Lake of Constance. These Roman highways, originally built for strategic purposes, were to carry public traffic for nearly two thousand years.

The first alpine pass to be transformed into a modern metalled highway was the Simplon. Considered to be an astonishing feat of engineering at the time, it was built on the order of Napoleon between 1800 and 1805 "pour faire passer le canon."

After 1815 some of the Swiss Cantons, in particular the Grisons, Ticino, Valais and Uri, carried out an intensive programme of road-building in the Alps. Thus, the San Bernardino and Splügen roads were built from 1818 to 1821 and the Julier from 1820 to 1826, while the years between 1820 and 1830 saw the gradual completion of the St. Gotthard highway, the main obstacle to which had been removed in 1707 by the opening-up of the Urner Loch

rock-gallery. Following the first Federal credits for military alpine roads, voted in 1861, roads were built over the following passes: Furka (1864), Oberalp (1863), Albula (1864) and Flüela (1866). Federal subsidies were granted towards the construction of the Ofenberg road (1871), the Lukmanier (1872), the Grimsel (1890) and the Umbrail and Klausen (1898) the latter being the last great alpine highways of that epoch. As the motor traffic increased, existing alpine roads were improved or reconstructed, especially the Julier, Gotthard and Simplon passes, the main improvement being the incorporation of dust-free surfaces and wider bends. During World War II the Susten road was begun, opened to traffic in 1946.

Since the end of the First World War, road transport has attained undreamt-of importance. The horse has been replaced by horse-power. The Post Office mail-coach organisation were quick to see the possibilities of motorisation in the service of their passengers. They now operate routes totalling several thousand miles in length, i.e. longer than the Federal Railway system, and handle a large share of the general traffic. No fewer than 26 million passengers are carried annually by the Post Office motor-coaches. Development of the road system is a heavy financial burden on district councils, Cantons and the whole Confederation alike. This burden is made all the heavier by the need for special mountain roads over the passes, anti-avalanche construction and tunnels. Not only has the number of motor vehicles risen very sharply in Switzerland — it will soon reach the million mark — but the growth of international traffic has meant that an additional 20 million foreign cars also circulate on Swiss roads over the year. Over and above this, some 66,000 visiting charabancs with 2 million tourists come to the country annually. A fair proportion of these use Switzerland only for transit travel to more distant destinations.

The National Road construction programme started about 10 years ago. The Cantons build them, but the Confederation finance them to about 80-90%. In 1959, the estimate for the total programme over 15 years was 3.8 milliard, but a few years later, it was 5.7 and in 1964 already 12.2 milliard. That increase cannot be attributed merely to an increase in costs. The motorway Geneva Lausanne showed an annual increase of 25% in the cost of construction. The individual wishes of Communes are often considered too carefully, involving the Confederation in unnecessary expense, and the question has been raised again and again that it is not rational to have a national scheme carried out by 22 individual cantonal *Baubüros*. Where such tremendous sums are involved, the cantonal autonomy is hardly justified. Already in 1964, it was suggested by "Trumpfbuhr" (*Aktion für freie Meinungsbildung*) that the whole construction programme should be handled by an independent mixed public body with juridical personality. But nothing has been done in this direction, and the figures mount . . .

Without cantonal contributions, the budget for 1967 estimated 650 million francs. No figures are yet available, but that sum has probably been reached if not surpassed. About 480m. have been received from fuel tax and customs revenue. Since the first accounts in 1969, Canton and Confederation have spent a total of 4.3 milliard francs on National Road Construction. The question of toll has been raised, but it would be difficult to get a majority decision by the electorate for the necessary change in the Constitution.

468.8km. or 26% of the total plan are in operation. 250km. are being constructed, of which 170km. are motorways. Of these 46km. should be open to traffic in 1968,

including 33.7km. of motorways. The Winterthur bypass (N1), the Lamone-Grancia/Melide stretch on the N2, the Richterswil/Pfaeffikon part of the N3, the Bargent/Leengenberg stretch in Schaffhausen (N4) and the Rothwald/Alter Spittel stretch on the Simplon route (N9).

The projects accepted by the end of 1967 (688.6km. of motorways, 276.5km. of second class National Roads and 249.2km. of roads for mixed traffic) will bring the total of 61% of the planned National Road network.

#### Road Accidents

Road accident figures are increasing and increasingly frightening. In 1967, there were 59,600 accidents, an increase of 5%, not counting those where damage to vehicles amounted to less than 200 francs. 1,450 people were killed and 31,250 injured. The figure of fatal accidents went up by 12%, but the number of cars only by 6%, including foreign motorists. These killed consisted of 971 men, 299 women and 180 children. About a third were over 60, and just over a fifth under 20. About 40% were killed in accidents in built-up areas. Five per cent more pedestrians were killed and 23% more motor cyclists.

The dominating cause of fatal accidents was speed, and 14% of those killed involved people the worse for drink. In this connection it may be interesting to note that an American insurance company made some revealing studies a few years ago, concerning characteristics of people who made claims for car accidents (61,000 were tested with the aid of electronic computers). In the first place were people whose predominant characteristic was poor co-operation, i.e. lack of consideration and of adaptability. People of doubtful character were in second place, and those of questionable morals in third. The fourth place was taken up by people with a criminal record, the fifth by heavy drinkers. Notoriously bad drivers were in sixth place, and car defects came nearly at the end.

Switzerland's transport facilities have been and continue to be of greatest importance to tourism. "Faster, farther, higher" — these are the watchwords of future technical development in transportation. Even though Switzerland is not on the way to the stratosphere, and despite the imminence of a 21st century way of life conditioned by cybernetics and automation, we still believe that beauty of the country's landscape and the intelligence of its population, who always keep abreast of the times and have a centuries-old tradition of feeling for the needs of the surrounding world, will continue to act as a magnet attracting the visitor.

And, finally, Switzerland has always observed a principle of reciprocity in her international tourist policy. Never have any difficulties been placed in the way of Swiss wishing to go abroad, whether in the form of police regulations or currency restrictions. Even in the crisis years, the basic principle of freedom of travel has always been defended and carried out in practice. The annual expenditure of Swiss travelling abroad is in the region of 920 million francs, a figure which bears witness to the enthusiasm of the Helvetians for visiting foreign resorts.

This international exchange of human relationships across all frontiers by means modern transport facilities is considered by the Swiss to be a great contribution to better understanding and goodwill between nations, promoting useful co-operations between different peoples and their governments.

(The first and last part of the article was written by Dr. A. Martin and reproduced by courtesy of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade — OSEC — and the part on road traffic is mainly based on information received by courtesy of Agence Télégraphique Suisse.)