

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

**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

**Band:** - (1971)

**Heft:** 1623

**Rubrik:** Comment

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# The Swiss Observer

Published Twice Monthly at  
63/67 TABERNACLE STREET  
LONDON E.C.2  
Tel.: 01-253 2321  
Telegrams: Paperwyse Stock London  
HON. PRESIDENT: Robert J. Keller  
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erous. The French are even worse. But the Germans and the British are reputed to be unstinting drivers. What tends to increase the reticence of many motorists is the actuarial liability they take upon themselves by giving rides to hitch-hikers. In the event of an accident they will be held to pay for whatever injury costs their passenger may demand.

There is no way for a hitch-hiker to predict how long he will have to wait for a ride. It's an irregular business. One hitch-hiker thumbed a ride from Barcelona to Geneva, fell on the right car and took just over 24 hours. Another required four-and-a-half days to cross France and emerged from the adventure worn out and harrassed. One will boast that his longest wait was three hours, another may have spent over a day in the same spot. There are a few elementary requisites for success in hitch-hiking, so obvious in fact that one wonders how they can so often be ignored. They are: To be suitably posted (namely, on a spot where cars drive slowly and can stop without danger); to be seen well in advance; not to be lumbered with a dozen bags; to be preferably alone; to have a reasonably clean and sympathetic appearance.

Despite these stringent requirements, we took quite a few hitch-hikers in the course of a 400-mile drive across Switzerland. Leaving Geneva for Lausanne on a stifling hot afternoon, I counted 19 hitch-hikers slumped on their bags staring at the steady stream of cars with outdrawn hands and bored faces. At Nyon, I picked up my first passengers. Two natives going to Lausanne and probably not bothered to wait for the omnibus train. They typified the local hitch-hiker, who travels between two neighbouring towns for reasons of immediate convenience. They are more readily picked up because they have no bulky baggage with them. They will wait as long as the next postal bus or train doesn't arrive.

The other kind of hitch-hiker is the international one, who travels on the motorists charity, because he is devoid of the means of travelling otherwise. There are of course exceptions. We have heard of a case of an American lawyer who travelled first-class from New York, stocked his specially sewn pouch with travellers cheques, and set out on a hitch-hiking tour to savour the free life of the modern highway tramp.

But the great majority of hitch-hikers adopt this frustrating way of travelling because the choice is either that or staying at home. At Moudon, I gave a lift to a Swedish hitch-hiker. He was a 19-year-old student journalist coming back from Spain. But for the goodwill of motorists, he would never have left his native Scandinavia. It had taken him two days to come

of *San Bernardino* has become easily accessible. It has hotels, parking lots, self-service restaurants, sun terraces, ski-hiking trails and still much scope for expansion. The main mechanical ascent opened last winter is the *San Bernardino-Confin* cableway.

*Scuol-Tarsp-Vulpera* continues to offer water cures, but added a cableway climbing to *Piz Champatsch* among its ski-ing infrastructure. Finally, *Stoos* plans to speed up its funicular railway, still the steepest in Europe.

## COMMENT

### THE HITCH HIKING DISEASE

A few years ago a driver stopped on the brow of a hill to pick up a hitch-hiker. A car that was following him swerved and collided with an on-coming lorry. Result of the incident: Two smashed vehicles and a dead man. The affair was raised during Question Time at the Commons and an incensed parliamentarian cried out that the hitch-hiker was a "modern kind of tramp".

An increasing number of motorists probably share similar feelings owing to the explosive growth of hitch-hiking. The fact that hitch-hiking is practised so generally must however mean that it is condoned and that many drivers are willing to give them mileage charity. No law prevents hitchhiking at present but if the trend continues, one can expect to see a conservative (and conservationist) politician present a motion banning this way of wrangling a journey. The proneness to offering a ride varies from country to country. The Swiss are apparently very ungen-

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from Perpignan—not a bad average. In Berne he alighted from my car at the entrance of the Zurich and Basle motorway, conveniently poised to thumb a further stretch of the long journey home. Incidentally, the motorist with a hitch-hiker in his car can be put in an embarrassing situation when he reaches a large town. Having conversed pleasantly and struck a friendship with his passenger over many miles, he may feel it a bit cruel to drop him off at the first crossroad, knowing that it may take him several hours to find his way across the town and find a suitable hitching point on the other side to continue his journey.

On the way from Délémont to Basle, I fell on two swarthy types hitching good humouredly in pouring rain. They were Spaniards making a hop to see Basle. They had no idea of what there was to see in the town, and painstakingly read my Michelin Guide's exposition of the city. Leaving Basle for Zurich I fell on two shaggy haired, shabbily dressed youths sitting on a pile of baggage including a tent, a guitar and two sleeping bags and looking miserable. I took them in. The car sagged heavily under their weight. It required fully opened windows and 50 m.p.h. to dissipate the acrid and sweaty smell which they emanated. The two chaps had set out for England three days previously and waited in vain for *one-and-a-half days* at the entrance of the Cologne motorway. Disgusted, they had decided to turn back and spend their holidays at home. They had been waiting for six hours on the spot where I picked them up.

Closing the ring and returning to Geneva by the Oberalp and the Furka Passes, I picked up a cheery young German with blonde hair at the beginning of the Furka climb. He was a theology student hoping to spend three weeks at *"Abri"*, the faith holiday camp founded by the hot-headed American theologian Francis Schaeffer at Huemoz, near Villars. He had been waiting for several hours and had undergone the irritation of seeing three girls posting themselves near to his hitch-hiking point and being picked up

within minutes.

At the end of the Rhone glacier we stopped to give a lift to a solitary French hiker. He had not eaten for three days and survived on cigarettes. He didn't appear to know where he was, nor where he was going, and slumped into sleep in the back of the car. He had strayed away from his

village and aimlessly criss-crossed Italy and Switzerland with a pair of plimsoles and his identity card. He begged for food money with a slight blush when the time had come for him to look for another lift.

The urge to travel apparently knows no obstacles.

(PMB)

## SWISS EVENTS

### SWISS AID TO PAKISTAN REFUGEES

The head of Swiss diplomacy Mr. Pierre Graber made a clear exposition of the efforts by Switzerland to come to the aid of the unfortunate millions huddled together on the East Pakistan border in the course of a Press Conference at the Federal Palace. The money that had been officially spent hitherto had amounted to about 4.5 million francs. Much of it had been used to acquire and send material of immediate necessity, such as tents, blankets, bandages, medicine and water purifying pills.

Half a million francs had furthermore been sent to the Swiss Red Cross and eventually found their way to help the Indian Red Cross. Mr. Graber on this occasion announced the expenditure of a further 6 million francs, 4 million of which would be given to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and serve to buy rice and food, the remainder to private organisations.

The official Swiss efforts at aiding East Pakistan refugees has therefore amounted to about 10 million francs (£1m), that is just over a franc per refugee. This is a piteously small sum in comparison with requirements, but is proportional to what other developed countries have paid out.

The Swiss government sent a special delegate, Mr. Burkhardt, to see what the refugees' needs were on the spot. He produced a report showing the practical obstacles to humanitarian aid. For one, he described the incred-

ibly difficult and exhausting duties of workers sent by charity organisations. They have to operate in a climate of terror, collective misery, epidemic and sickness, filth, monsoons, rats and vermin and have to contend with an inefficient and hopelessly inadequate local administration.

Mr. Burkhardt raised the possibility of taking care of famished refugee children and giving them a haven in Switzerland. He saw that there were unsurmountable disadvantages and that the children would only be exposed to the cruelty of being given shelter and a taste of peaceful prosperity only to be sent back to their material miseries once the Pakistan problem would have been resolved. Besides, there were every indication that this service would not have been politically feasible. There is always a degree of powerlessness with those that would like to help in such dramatic circumstances.

Switzerland however managed to be helpful during the crisis in its own traditional way. At the joint demand of India and Pakistan, it handled the airlift of 147 Pakistanis in Calcutta and that of 257 Indian diplomatic staff in Dacca. An Iranian, Soviet and specially chartered Swissair jet were used in the minutely prepared operation.

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