

The ups and dons of alpine travel

Autor(en): **[s.n.]**

Objekttyp: **Article**

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

Band (Jahr): **- (1984)**

Heft 1814

PDF erstellt am: **28.04.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688858>

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THE world's most famous railway book is without doubt Agatha Christie's "Orient Express", a high-speed story of crime and suspense that has been as successful on the big screen as in print.

If you think *that* adventure is a bit far-fetched, there are a couple of Swiss railway books that will bring your feet back to the ground. But that's about all. The rest of you will be up in the clouds, for these railways travel high up in the mountains.

"Glacier Express" and "Jungfrau Express" are peculiar titles for books describing train journeys that are anything but fast. But as Robert Brookes has found out, both railways have had a rich and fascinating history by being slow but sure.

"Jungfrau Express" by Verena Gurtner, published by Orell Füssli

IF you look at it logically, this book is all about travelling in the dark.

The reason is that for 80 per cent of the 9.3 kilometers from Kleine Scheidegg to Europe's highest railway station at the Jungfrauoch, the trains of the Jungfrau Railway travel in tunnels or galleries.

But this trip through the heart of the Eiger and Mönch mountains in the Bernese Alps

takes you to some of the most breathtaking scenery in Switzerland.

And it's not only the scenery that takes your breath away – the air here at the altitude of 3,454 metres is also a contributing factor.

Plenty of books have been written about the grandiose trio of the Eiger, Mönch and Jungfrau. This book describes the pioneer work of Swiss engineer Adolf Guyer-Zeller, a man whose pet hobby was to want to bring thousands of tourists in safety to the beauty of those high Alps.

The ups and downs of Alpine travel

Climbing the Eiger North Wall is often considered crazy. At the end of the last century it was thought just as audacious if not downright objectionable to build a railway to the peak of the Jungfrau at 4,158 metres up in the air.

Verena Gurtner, in this down-to-earth account of how the railway was conceived and built, threads the romance of the railway idea with the technical background that was needed to

translate that idea into reality.

With a maximum gradient of 25 per cent for almost a third of its length, the Jungfrau Railway was and still is a major engineering feat.

Tunnelling through extremely tough rock, designing cog wheels and cog rails to climb so steeply and using electricity for power may seem fairly straightforward nowadays. As Verena Gurtner illustrates, it was very much pioneer work in the 1890s.

This little book has a mine of detail in its 128 pages, not only about the Jungfrau Railway, but also about what the tourist can find once having reached the Jungfrauoch.

There are descriptions of the dogs which take tourists on a ride on the Aletsch Glacier, the ice palace beneath the plateau of the Jungfrauoch, and the research station where scientific experiments are carried out in thin air.

"Jungfrau Express" with its 32 colour plates, 81 illustrations, four maps and 18 tables is now in its fifth edition in English. And a measure of its popularity is that it is also available in Japanese!

"Glacier Express" by Paul Caminada, published by Desertina Verlag.

LET'S join the world's slowest express train on its 290 kilometre journey between the two Swiss alpine tourist centres of Zermatt and St Moritz.



A train of the Jungfrau Railway with the snow-capped Jungfrau mountain in the background. Photo: Bahnen der Jungfrau-Region.

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And if you missed features like bridges and viaducts on the Jungfrau Railway – you can be excused because there aren't any – you won't be disappointed on this enterprising stretch of railway.

If you've never travelled on the Glacier Express from the Matterhorn to the Bernina and you've never seen the films about the journey produced by West German and Japanese television, this book will help bridge the gap.

Author Paul Caminada takes his reader over more than 300 bridges and through 90 tunnels on a journey across one of the most extensive and awe-inspiring alpine regions of Europe – passing through the two magnificent valleys of the Rhône and the Rhine.

About half of the book is devoted to the actual journey, its ups and downs from West to East, from canton Valais to canton Grisons.

Old photographs contrasting with new, aerial views, maps and illustrations help create an accurate impression of a railway journey which is a day's experience never to be forgotten.

The author works for a consulting engineering company and this may explain why the text sometimes appears rather dry.

Some of the romance of the Glacier Express is certainly missing. There is no description of the notorious restaurant car where the bases of the glasses are sloped to cope with the gradients and where after-lunch schnaps is



served from a height.

But that is no great disappointment because there are other equally entertaining anecdotes, for example there's a description of hotel magnate Caesar Ritz dubbed "the hotelier of kings and king of hoteliers" and of

Alexander Seiler, founder of the Seiler hotel dynasty.

Also in this book is a short history of the building of the railway line and of the railway companies concerned – the Brig-Visp-Zermatt and the Gornergrat Railway, the Furka-Oberalp

Railway and the Rhaetian Railway.

Some of the world's express trains have fallen victim to technical progress, but not the Glacier Express. As Paul Caminada explains, the opening to traffic in 1982 of the costly and controversial Furka Base Tunnel on the line not only links two alpine regions, it also represents the only East-West connection in the Swiss Alps which is open all year round.

And that is not only good news for the railway companies concerned, but also for the tourists and railway enthusiasts who want to ride the Glacier Express.

"Jungfrau Express" by Verena Gurtner costs Sfr 22 and Paul Caminada's "Glacier Express" retails at Sfr 49.50. In Britain, both books can be obtained from Robert Spark, Railway Literature, Evelyn Way, Cobham, Surrey KT11 2SJ.



Bridging the gap with the Glacier Express.
Photo: Furka-Oberalp-Bahn.