

# Letter by the Swiss minister to the president of the Swiss Relief Centre

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## LETTER BY THE SWISS MINISTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE SWISS RELIEF CENTRE.

18, Montagu Place,  
Bryanston Square, W.1.

18th July, 1940.

Monsieur le Président,

Last week you were kind enough to invite Madame Thurnheer and myself to visit the "Swiss Relief Centre." We both were very glad to have the opportunity of viewing this new establishment which we inspected from top to bottom. We were particularly impressed by the perfect neatness, the excellent planning and the arrangement of the various rooms; everything is simple, practical and friendly. One can see that each member of the Committee and of their sub-committees, to all of whom I am most grateful, have done their utmost to obtain the best result with the funds at their disposal.

This brings me to the question of the donors. I have looked through the records of the contributions in money and kind and was extremely pleased with the results of the collection. It shows plainly that there exists the right spirit in the London Colony when an appeal is made for the creation of a useful institution. There is good reason to be proud of such a Colony and I should like to express my sincere thanks to all the generous contributors.

If you wish to publish this letter in the "Swiss Observer," I gladly authorize you to do so.

Believe me to be, Monsieur le Président,  
yours sincerely,

W. THURNHEER,  
Ministre de Suisse.

## THE RHAETIAN RAILWAY.

### An Uncelebrated Centenary.

(*"Modern Transport,"* 13.7.40.)

Visitors in pre-war days to the Rhaetian Alps and the Engadine had reason to know the Rhaetian Railway, which gave them access to such resorts as Davos and St. Moritz, and carried them, through dizzy twists and turns, across improbably high-looking viaducts, through some of the most superb mountain country in Europe. In the autumn of last year, the company celebrated their jubilee, or, rather, they would have celebrated it but for the intervention of war. Half a century ago, eastern Switzerland was one of the more particularly inaccessible regions of the Continent. It was possible to skirt the Engadine by rail; within, lumbering diligences in summer and picturesquely inefficient sleighs in winter served rather to emphasise the quite frightening remoteness of the mountain villages. It was an impossible country for the construction of orthodox standard gauge railways.

But where the standard gauge might not penetrate, the metre gauge could, and, in the early autumn of 1889, the first section of what was to be the present Rhaetian Railway system was completed between

Landquart, where connection was made with the standard gauge United Swiss system, and Klosters. A festal trial trip, complete with the traditional brass band on an open car in the rear, was made on September 29th, and the regular train service followed on October 9th. This initial section had a length of 20½ miles. It was extended a further 10½ miles, southwards from Klosters, in July of the following year, and for the first time Davos, already known as a resort, was connected with the main European railway system. In 1896 an isolated stretch of metre gauge line was opened further south, between Chur and Thusis, but in the same summer the intervening gap between Chur and Landquart was filled up. These four sections gave the infant system, at the turn of the century, a route mileage of slightly over 57 miles. In July, 1904, the completion of the necessarily devious Albula Railway, with its famous tunnel, linked up Thusis with St. Moritz. By July, 1913, the Rhaetian Railway system had attained its present form, extending south to Pontresina, east to Schuls, and west to Disentis, comprising in all 164½ miles of route.

To-day, the Rhaetian Railway, in itself a remarkably extensive and efficient example of a narrow gauge railway, forms a link in an even more extensive metre gauge system. The Bernina Railway, in the south, provides an outlet to northern Italy from Pontresina; westwards from Disentis (reached by the Rhaetian lines in 1912) a through route extends, by means of the Furka-Oberalp Railway and the Visp-Zermatt Railway, far down through Andermatt, Gletsch and Brig to the foot of the Matterhorn. Present appendages of the Rhaetian include the truly remarkable Davos-Parsonn funicular railway, one of the newest Swiss lines, which materialised at the beginning of the early nineteen thirties.

The original line was operated by a company calling itself the Landquart-Davos Narrow-Gauge Railway, having its headquarters at Davos. The Rhaetian Railway Company, as we know it to-day, received its title in 1899. The company has for years had its headquarters at Chur, while the locomotive, carriage and wagon works are at Landquart, the original starting point.

Throughout the system, in spite of the narrow gauge railway propensity for slipping round corners and zigzagging down slopes, the Rhaetian Railway is rich in major engineering features. The Albula Tunnel, between Preda and Spinas, carrying a single metre-gauge track, is 6,414 yd. in length, and was begun in October, 1899. Very severe trouble was encountered with underground springs, and the bore was not completed until the end of February, 1903. The railway's struggle with natural forces was not ended merely by the completion of the system. Nature having her own way of hitting back sometimes, especi-

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