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1965 The Year
of the Alps

ABOVE THE MOTORING-LINE

By Wing Commander E. BENTLEY BEAMAN

Every year the search for peaceful holiday resorts grows keener and every year they seem to be getting harder and harder to find. Among the better-known alpine centres, for instance, there are now only four where cars are not allowed into the village or are unable to enter it for physical reasons.

One of these is Braunwald, situated on a wooded terrace at a height of 4,000 ft. in north-east Switzerland. It is reached from Linthal in the Canton of Glarus by a mile-long funicular railway which with a gradient of two in three is one of the steepest in the country. From time to time there has been talk of building a road, but there seems little prospect of such a retrograde step, at any rate for the time being. For when this proposal was discussed at a council meeting most were in favour of keeping Braunwald as one of the few carless villages. One protagonist of the scheme, however, put forward the theory that the younger generation might feel unhappy away from the sight, sound and smell of cars!

Above the funicular the long village street winds through green slopes dotted with modern chalets, many of them built for use in the holidays. At one time the Niederschlacht, with five beds for tourists, was the only inn. Now it has been greatly enlarged and modernised and in this and the other hotels 500 guests can be received, in addition to those staying in the numerous chalets.

The best way of getting a general view of the district is from the Gumen, a viewpoint 2,000 feet higher, which can easily be reached on foot or by chair-lift. From here there is a fine panorama of the Linthal Valley and the high mountains on the other side. Standing out among these is the Tödi chain, the main peak of which reaches a height of nearly 12,000 feet.

* * *

This summit will always be connected with the earliest days of Swiss mountaineering history and in particular with Father Placidus, a Benedictine monk from Disentis, scholar, philosopher, and enthusiastic mountaineer. He made several first ascents during the early part of the nineteenth century as well as six attempts on the Tödi; and it was he, when in his 73rd year in 1824, who from 800 feet below the top urged on two chamois-hunters to reach the summit for the first time.

This range, which offers several good climbs, seems to have been neglected by British mountaineers, though there have been two notable exceptions: Professor G. I. Finch, of Everest fame and lately President of the Alpine Club, has made no fewer than 22 ascents of the mountain, among them by one or two new routes; also it was the first high mountain climbed by that great explorer and mountaineer, the late F. S. Smythe.

From the Gumen there are several good walks and scrambles to be made on and around the small peaks above it, as indeed there are from the village itself. One of the more attractive of these is to the Fritternalp. For about an hour a level path leads through forests as far as another belvedere with the delightful name of Nussbohl (the Nut Bowl). Here it is as well to pause for, soon

afterwards, there is a steep ascent to near the foot of a shattered rock ridge which has strewn its debris all over the mountainside. The path winding through the rubble is brightened by a variety of alpine flowers which attract most of the district's butterflies.

The day we made the walk, at the end of the marked track we came across a notice which read: "Achtung Steinschläge!" (Beware of Stonefalls!) but as it was pointing in the direction from which we had come we were not perturbed. After a while the way narrowed and we came face to face with a heard of Jerseys coming from the opposite direction. We had no alternative but to force our way through the middle of them. Their bearded herdsman gave us a friendly "Grüss Gott".

* * *

Before long we were resting on a grassy alp out of sight of man or beast with nothing in view but high hills and passes. Soon, however, we were to have another reward for our efforts. During the previous few days we had watched a pair of eagles soaring high above the Linthal Valley. Now we were to have the privilege of observing these magnificent birds circling low over our heads — so close, indeed, that we could easily distinguish their primary feathers. We felt that we must have been trespassing somewhere near their eyrie. It seems that eagles are not rare in this part of the country, as in some regions, and there are times when the birds become a menace to lambs and young chamois. Then the gendarmes are called in to shoot them, though, whenever possible, they leave a pair alive in each valley.

In recent years Braunwald has become a popular winter sports centre. It has a skating and a curling rink and wide snow slopes suitable for beginners and moderate ski-runners. There are two large terraces which look as though they had been specially designed for the purpose. On the lower shelf there is plenty of room for nursery slopes, a ski-school, and a few short runs, the start of which can be reached by various ski hoists and lifts. The slopes above, with their longer runs and steeper gradients, are better suited to the more advanced skiers. There is, too, a ski-hut a short way from the top of the Gumen chair-lift and not far from the foot of the Ortstock. For those more expert, who are still in good training, there are one or two tough cross-country runs.

In the same region as Braunwald, and worth a visit, are other unspoiled resorts such as Wildhaus, Säntis, Unterwasser and Alt St. Johann.

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[S.N.T.O.]

FROM MOTOR CARS TO MOTOR BOATS AT THE GENEVA SHOW 11th to 21st March 1965

Geneva's 35th International Motor Show, this year more varied, more complete than ever, attracted a record number of visitors: 426,791 as against 411,677 last year. They included many distinguished personalities from the motoring world at home and abroad.

The main reason for this increase, the organizers feel, is the spectacular rise of tourism and travel which Europe has experienced during the 1960's. Apart from the main feature of the Show, which was, of course touring cars, this year several large sections were devoted to "popular" tourism, with a display of caravans and camping equipment, and, reappearing in Geneva after a two-year absence, an entire nautical and boat section covering 40,000 square feet of exhibition area.