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GORNERGRAT 3010 - a hotel reborn.

Photographs: George Hoekstra

At the beginning of May, David Stevenson and I were invited to sample the new Glacier Express. David has already written about this event (Swiss Express – June 2006). As an add-on, we all took a trip up to the Gornergrat above Zermatt, to see the newly renovated hotel. As there were only about 30 beds available, most of the journalists had to go back down to Zermatt to spend the night. David and I were lucky to both get a room. David though, perfect gentleman that he usually is, gave up his room to an English lady journalist, who was so terribly disappointed to be left out... I myself did have a special reason to visit the hotel. About ten years ago, I did some work as a hotel-tester. I visited the old hotel at the time to do a review for an American company. Then, it really was a terrible place: dark, dirty and the staff were surly. Most of the many youth hostels I have been to were cleaner and certainly a lot friendlier!

Now though, I am glad to be able to report that the renovated hotel and its new management are back to top standard. The renovations were done with inspiration and respect for its environment at over 10,000 ft. The rooms are comfortable, without any unnecessary luxury and water- and energy-guzzling items like Jacuzzis. All the rooms are named after one of the high mountains in the immediate area. The room numbers correspond to the height in meters. My room was "Weisshorn", with the number 4505. Inside the room, there is a sectional view of the altitudes of this mountain on one of the walls. It is planned to mark the summit with a small bit of rock from that mountain. I hope the souvenir-hunters will leave those alone. We were also able to sample the efforts of the crew of the restaurant. It was a wonderful experience.



View from the cab on the way down to Zermatt. It does not look it, but the fresh snow here is 2 feet high.

The best thing of all, though, is the view you get of the mountains all around you. Switzerland's most famous mountain, the Matterhorn, manifests itself very prominently. When we went up to the Gornergrat in the late afternoon, unfortunately everything was in the clouds. As happens very often at this time of the year, we had about two feet of snow in the night and a wonderful clear morning. The sight of the first rays of the sun on the mountain at just before six is one you will never forget.

This hotel can now be highly recommended by this reviewer! I had to



After arrival at Zermatt, the early morning sun was strong enough to have melted most the snow off the unit.

Due to the snowfall in the night, the first train is coming up with a snow blower in front. The cutting blades are clearly visible, churning up the snow below and blowing it away to the left. Note the twin pantographs: the Gornergrat Bahn was built using three phase current.



take the first train down to Zermatt to be able to attend the presentation of the new book on the Simplon Railway in Brig that morning. It was very early: the path down to the station had not yet been cleared. I had to plough through the two feet of snow – not very easy for me. Due to arthritis in the knees, I have to walk with a stick and I also will be 70 this year! Anyway, I got there. The first train came up

with a big snow-blower in front. It was a picture not to miss. But it was very difficult. I wanted to show the cutting blades while the train was still moving, so I had to use a high speed. But the station was still in the shade, so even with the snow, light was not great. Because the gates were still closed – it was the first train – I had a tight spot and only one chance! Conditions like these are the reason I insisted that my camera had to have a manual setting facility, no matter how many exposure programs were offered. Happily, I got it right! When I climbed on the train, I was lucky. I have been writing for LOKI Magazine in Switzerland for over 20 years; so hundreds of people connected to the Railways know me. Also the driver of this train: he offered me a cab ride down to Zermatt! All in all, it was a memorable experience! See the pictures!