

Zeitschrift: Swiss express : the Swiss Railways Society journal
Herausgeber: Swiss Railways Society
Band: - (2013)
Heft: 116

Artikel: With Thomas Cook to Switzerland
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-854241>

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WITH THOMAS COOK TO SWITZERLAND


Michael Farr



An atmospheric view from the summit of the Rigi. Photo: David Noël
LEFT: Thomas Cook as he looked in 1863

Almost 150 years to the day that Thomas Cook's first Grand Tour left London for Switzerland and France, a party of modern-day travellers, sponsored by Swiss Tourism, followed in their footsteps. The details of Cook's early tours are known thanks to a diary found in one of the company's offices after it was bombed during WW2. Only the lady's first name was known, Miss Jemima, but after much research she was found to be Miss Jemima Morrell of Selby, Yorkshire. The itinerary was advertised as visiting "Geneva, Lucerne and other principal places in the Alpine Districts" and not only would it help transform Switzerland's fledgling tourist industry but also open up such trips to the middle classes; until now the "Grand Tours" had been the preserve of the well-to-do. On Friday 26 June 1863 the 130 travellers woke in a hotel in London at four o'clock, to breakfast before heading for the LB&SCR's London Bridge station to catch the boat train to Newhaven. They arrived in Genève the following Sunday where they tucked into a ten course lunch; two days later they were in Chamonix from where they moved on to Leukerbad, and they joined the mixed bathing where men and women sat in water at 124°F for four hours at a time. The following Monday found them climbing the Wengernalp. Moving on by Thursday they were in central Switzerland and up early again - 3am to be precise. Jemima's description was poetical, "We counted about 150 early risers. . . awaiting the rising sun on the Rigi as in stately process he rises from the dusky mist, and with one glance of his ruby eye suffuses the ashy visages of that snowy congress . . ." The travellers had returned to London by 16 July when Jemima's brother William noted "A tour to Switzerland and France 26 June to 16 July, twenty one days inclusive £19.17s.6d. If only . . ." Was his 'if only' a regret that he

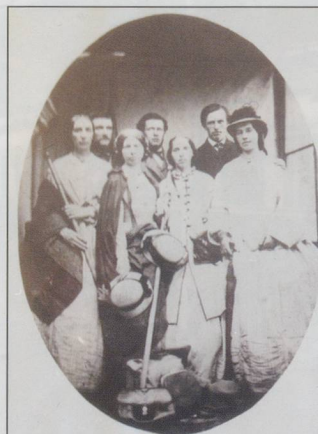
had not done it, or what?

Fast forward 150 years and Jemima set out again in the guise of Helen Mort, who had won a competition sponsored by Swiss Tourism and Inntravel who are now marketing the tour. Sadly the cost has increased slightly (!) - at a cost of £1,740 per person with two people sharing rooms. For this you have 12 nights' B&B, 9 dinners and a four-day Swiss Pass. However, travel to Switzerland is extra giving the choice of rail or air. If you prefer to hike they will arrange for your luggage to be taken on ahead. 

RIGHT: 1950s vintage transport, not quite 1863. Modern photos: Diccon Bewes.

BOTTOM: The 1863 party and the 2013 party. Diccon Bewes is the snappy dresser in brown on the left.

Old images courtesy of Thomas Cook.



1863



2013