

# Summer snow

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**SUMMER SNOW.**

By FRED DOSSENBACH, JR.

From Grindelwald, at night, you can see a pin point of light in the huge north wall of the Eiger. It twinkles steadily, a yellow star lost on the perpendicular side of the mountain. No hut could possibly cling to the sheer slope, no winding path could find its way up the precipitous wall of rock and snow. Yet the tiny light flickers impudently, like a street lamp truant in the mountain vastness. And this, as a matter of fact, is just about what the light is.

But instead of a miraculous street to the sky, a ribboning tunnel leads to and above the light, which gleams from Eigerwand, one of the stations of the Jungfrau Railroad. The station has windows chiseled through the massive rock, and from here tourists can gaze wide-eyed into the valley almost directly below.

A trip to Jungfrauoch is a treat for superlative enthusiasts. The Jungfrau Railroad is the world's highest, the Hotel Berghaus Europe's loftiest, the Aletsch glacier the Continent's largest.

Then there is an Ice Palace which is "underground" at an altitude of over 11,000 ft. You can take a ride on a sled drawn by thick furred huskies, or if you wish, even ski. Every July there is an important Ski Meet held at the Joch, with slalom, downhill and jumping competitions. And only 3½ hours away green hills surround lakes whose various beaches are crowded with tanned swimmers.

Interlaken, the famed resort lying between the lakes of Thun and Brienz, will probably be the starting point of your excursion to the Joch. From both Lauterbrunnen and Grindelwald, which are in valleys on opposite sides of the Scheidegg ridge, the Wengernalp Railroad takes you to Little Scheidegg. Naturally you will return via the opposite route you took in ascending.

The trains of the Jungfrau Railroad nose their way slowly from Little Scheidegg to Eigerletscher, where you are in the shadow of the snow and glacier world. After Eigerletscher the brown cars enter the tunnel, and as they start boring up through the Eiger and Monch to Jungfrauoch, your eardrums feel the lessening pressure of increasing altitude.

At station Eigerwand everyone gets out for a look through the great windows. It was here that Swiss guides started their attempt to rescue the four young German climbers who in the summer of 1936 tried to be the first group to scale the Eiger north wall. But the implacable mountain claimed four more lives, and the guides themselves had narrow escapes from the stones that constantly tumble down the vertical wall. It is almost unbelievable that the guides could start their rescue attempt from here; even more so that the German youths were three-quarters of the way to the summit before the mist, and rain and cold made their fatal appearance. Undoubtedly this summer will see the challenge of the Eiger accepted again. A party of clear-eyed, confident climbers will match their skill and endurance against the relentless gods of the mountains. And the battle will go on till the peak is conquered. Rash and foolhardy? Perhaps. But magnificent, too.

Where at Eigerwand everything is dominated by the colossal wall of rock, at Eismeer the windows open to a world of snow and ice, snow and ice so dazzling that you probably have to put on your sun-goggles. The eternal wind brushes over the snow, whispering sibilantly as it raises tiny whirlpools of white powder that twist and vanish into thin air. Above you huge blocks of snow pile over each other, and a glacier crevasse is a great green wound knifed deep into the sharp slanting slope.

About an hour after you have left Little Scheidegg, you arrive at Jungfrauoch. The train stops right at the entrance to the Hotel Berghaus, which has every modern convenience, including telephone service to all parts of the world.

The balcony on the main floor looks out over the Aletsch glacier, a huge motionless river of snow covered ice, banked on either side by the mountains, which finally hide it as it curves away in the distance. Crowning the far horizon, snow peaks scrape a blue sky flaked here and there with a wisp of cloud. You look through the telescope at the jagged summit of the Jungfrau, which from here looks completely different than from Interlaken.

A little to the left of the Berghaus is the Tourist House, which offers more modest accommodations, principally for the mountaineering parties. There is, during the summer, an ascent almost every day to the 13,500 ft. summits of the Jungfrau and Monch. In the opposite direction of the Joch plateau, the 800 ft. Sphinx Tunnel leads to the vast glittering snowfields of the Jungfraufrin.

Everyone is discovering some point of interest that apparently no one else has seen, and the balcony is noisy with remarks made in French, German and English. Some of the visitors feed

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crumbs of bread to the jet black alpine jack-daws who, eyeing every movement, sway in the gusty wind with motionless wings. Then swooping and swirling, and cawing greedily, they pursue a morsel thrown toward the glacier, never failing to finally snatch the treasure in a shary yellow bill.

After lunch in the cheery restaurant you go to the Joch plateau, which is a short walk from the hotel. An elevator takes you to the fourth floor, and after going through a short corridor, you suddenly emerge into warm and brilliant sunlight. The hard packed snow path leads to the top of the plateau, and you walk to the small hut that is perched so close to the edge of the ridge that part of its shadow is lost in the yawning space below. A fresh wind whips by, dry cool and clean. You are, for this moment, at the edge of the world.

Ahead of you, as far as you can see, there are snow mountains which even from here, sometimes hide the horizon. There are green hills melting to the flat floors of the valleys and the valleys wind away and lose themselves again behind the high peaks. The hotels at Little Scheidegg are toy houses, and Interlaken is a scrambled, varicoloured patch in the emerald valley carpet. Behind you, on the summit of the Jungfrau, a wind swept plume of snow fades into the sun. This scene, in all its vastness and beauty, will be everlasting in the picture book of your memory.

On the way back to the Berghaus you visit the Ice Palace. A stocky mountaineer, his seamed face saddle brown, stands a little before the entrance to help you safely down the narrow path, which is nothing more than a haphazard flight of snow steps.

The first sensation underground is that it is much warmer than you expected. This is due to the dry air of the high altitude. You walk down a carpeted flight of ice steps, and the ceiling of the passage is flaked with countless, multi-designed little snow and ice forms. The ice walls are a pastel green with a hint of blue.

Suddenly you are in the Bar. Everything except the electric lights is cut out of ice. There are two booths, whose tables have vases filled with ice flowers, and in the corner is a piano which defies the efforts of the most determined jazzmen. The bar itself is minus only the brass rail and the high stools, on which it would be too difficult and cold to sit, anyhow.

Through another corridor and you enter the main room, with huge pillars gracefully supporting the domed ceiling. Here, in this royal room of blue-green ice, so reminiscent of a Maxfield Parrish painting, you can hire a pair of ice-skates, and after whirling over the smooth floor, you can justly claim that no one has ever skated higher underground than you have.

Before the train leaves you send a postcard or two. Perhaps you cannot resist the urge to tweek the noses of sweltering friends back home, and you mention snow and ice and cool breezes.

There is a final rush to buy souvenirs before returning to the every-day world. The last passenger takes his seat, and the conductor's whistle pipes shrilly. The train starts creeping slowly downward. And in a little while it's summer again.

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