

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band: - (1965)
Heft: 1477

Artikel: It might be worth your while
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690693>

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IT MIGHT BE WORTH YOUR WHILE

Was it really necessary to pile up the mountains right in the middle of the country, where their only purpose seems to be to obstruct the passage of the hurried traveller?

You Swiss have otherwise quite an acceptable country. You have hostelrys catering to all needs: they offer good food and good drinks, they provide for those who want to live as well as those who, having lived, want to relax. You possess a varied assortment of amenities appreciated by your guests, and you have learned to offer them pleasingly.

But there you are! You cannot take a step without bumping against a mountain or rather, whole ranges of mountains! You admire them from below, and you venture up on top of them to have a look down.

Of course, we have the sea instead. And just as you are not content with looking at the mountains, we do not admire the sea from the shore only. We venture out on the open sea to experience its grandeur and the feeling of infinity it conveys, as you venture on top of your mountains, for the same reasons.

Seen from this angle, I cannot but change my mind in respect of your mountains. They have not only their forbidding side, after all. And I can well imagine the feeling of elation that rewards the mountain climber when he reaches his goal.

On closer inspection I also find that the mountains in your country do not form an insurmountable barrier. There are not only mule tracks, but full-fledged roads that wind up on their flanks towards the passes between the peaks, near enough to afford an impressive view of their majesty and beauty.

I have a good mind to go and see what the other side looks like. It is made so easy by the yellow coaches of the Swiss postal service, which travel safely over a great many picturesque pass roads, their characteristic three-tone signal echoing through the mountains. At every stop you find a time-table posted up. If you are a sufficiently large group, you can even ignore it and board a coach when and where you please, as I was told at the post office. This is really worth thinking about, all the more so as those of my friends who already took a trip are quite enthusiastic about it.

Are these mountains looming in front of me really so fearful and dangerous as they look? There was a time, I know, when they had a reputation of being haunted by fire spitting dragons and other dreadful monsters. And they still look threatening enough with their crags, sheer walls of rock and chasms spanned by bold bridges.

But at the sight of the postal coach driver any apprehensions I might have melted away like the snow in the sun. This man is up to his task. He knows his vehicle and he also knows his mountains. He breathes responsibility and you instantly feel that you can entrust yourself to him and relax.

I also took the opportunity to have a closer look at his vehicle. Power and comfort reunited! Just what it needs to ensure the passenger a pleasurable and exciting trip through the beautiful scenery that surrounds him.

The Swiss postal coach will not have waited for me in vain. On second thoughts I no longer find it so preposterous that the mountains should be piled up right in the middle of the country . . .

J. STEBLER

[S.N.T.O.]

SWISS WEATHER NEWS

Generally speaking, it was a reasonably good winter in Switzerland. In the Midlands cattle could feed on green fodder right into November, the longest period ever recorded (records date back to 1909).

January brought plenty of snow, followed by mild weather even at high altitudes around the middle of the month. This led to "Foehn" by the end of January. February opened with mild weather, immediately followed by a decrease in temperature. On 4th February, an earthquake was registered during several hours. On 8th February, a rare phenomenon occurred in Zurich, a thunderstorm while it was snowing heavily. There were storms elsewhere, and in the Grisons, winds at 80-90 km.p.h. were recorded. By the 10th, a biting cold reigned all over Switzerland. Temperatures sank rapidly. St. Moritz had -23° and "Swiss Siberia" at La Brevine even -30° .

By the middle of February, heavy snow falls occurred everywhere, accompanied by avalanches, dislocation of traffic and accidents. By the end of the month, several of the smaller lakes were frozen, such as the Hallwiler-, Greifen-, and Sempachersee.

On 4th March, the 400 pheasants which had been flown from Hungary to Geneva to prevent the extinction of the species in Switzerland, had to be left in the care of a breeder, as there was too much snow for them to be let loose. The cold lessened by mid-March, and the heavy rainfalls caused the flooding of several rivers. The level of the Lake of Neuchâtel rose by 60 cm. in a few days. The "Gorges de la Ronde" near La Chaux-de-Fonds became a lake, and there were landslides in the Valais.

Then came beautiful spring weather with much sunshine, though some frost at night. The earthquake in Greece was again registered in all Swiss stations. By early April, the almond trees in the Valais were in blossom, and by the 10th, half a million apricot trees were in bloom.

Then suddenly, there were heavy snowfalls at Easter right down to the plains. This meant a record in winter sport activities over the holiday, but in the lowlands the weather was cold, rainy and unfriendly. On 20th April, new snowfalls occurred in all parts of Switzerland, and Berne had over four inches the next day. By the end of the month, twelve passes were still closed, and the last news received before going to press was that "the uncomfortable weather continues".

In February, it was announced that the Swiss Meteorological Central Institute, the MZA, will be modernised and extended. Its existence dates back to 1880, and one of its main functions is the compiling of weather forecasts. The MZA has its offices on the Zuerichberg, and its special flight weather station is at Kloten Airport.

[A.T.S.]