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The Gotthard road tunnel is open
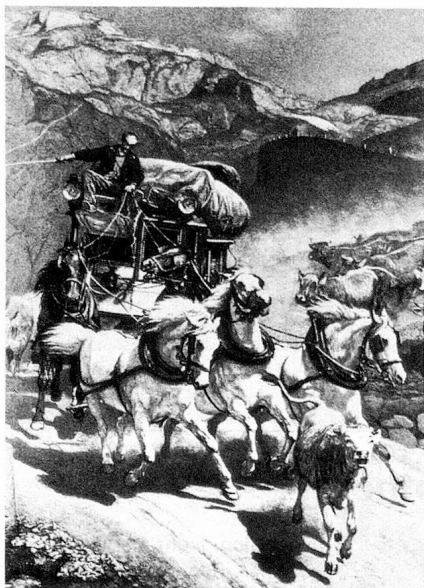
The Gotthard post coach in 1873 depicted by the painter Rudolf Koller.

Since the 5th September 1980, the Canton of Ticino is only 15 minutes away by car from the rest of Switzerland. On that day, the Gotthard road tunnel was opened after 11 years of construction work. From a technical viewpoint, this is a marvel whose importance reaches well beyond the Swiss frontiers. With 16.9 km, it is the longest road tunnel in the world.

The initiative came from the Government of the Ticino, the automobile associations and a Gotthard Committee, and on their urgent appeal, the Federal Council set up a «Study Group Gotthard Road Tunnel» in 1960. Their conclusion was that whilst a «rolling road» by train would probably be more economic, a road tunnel would be more suitable from a communications policy point of view. In 1965, Parliament gave its consent to the plan that a road tunnel from Goeschenen to Airolo should be included in the Swiss National Road Network. Construction was begun in the autumn of 1969. The actual tunnelling lasted

around 8 years. At peak times, up to 730 workers from Italy, Turkey, Yougoslavia, the Federal German Republic, Austria and Switzerland were employed on the site. 19 workmen lost their lives in accidents. The cost of the road tunnel amounted to 686 million Francs (the estimated amount was 306 m in 1969). 90% was carried by the Confederation. Maintenance costs are estimated at about 6 millions Francs *per annumn.* The actual tunnel tube under the Gotthard range ist 16.3 km long. In addition, there is a preliminary tunnel of 600 metres near Goeschenen. The tunnel opening there is at an altitude of 1081 m above sea-level. Near Airolo it is somewhat higher, at 1145 m. Thus the Gotthard road tunnel is the lowest Alpine transverse. The width of the road is 7.8 m, and the two roads have a capacity of 1800 vehicles per hour and direction. The length of the tunnel and the fact that driving is in both directions necessitated extraordinary technical installations and safety mea-

sures. For the extraction of exhaust gases and the intake of fresh air, 4 air shafts and 6 ventilation centres with 18 ventilators are in operation. At peak hours, the tunnel uses as much electricity as a town of 30 000 inhabitants ...

The tunnel is supervised from the operation centres at Goeschenen and Airolo by means of television cameras. If necessary one of the traffic light situated at every 250 metres can come into operation immediately. Should there be a fire, 67 shelters connected by a safety tunnel are available; these can be closed hermetically. 200 SOS stations have been installed in case of puncture trouble.
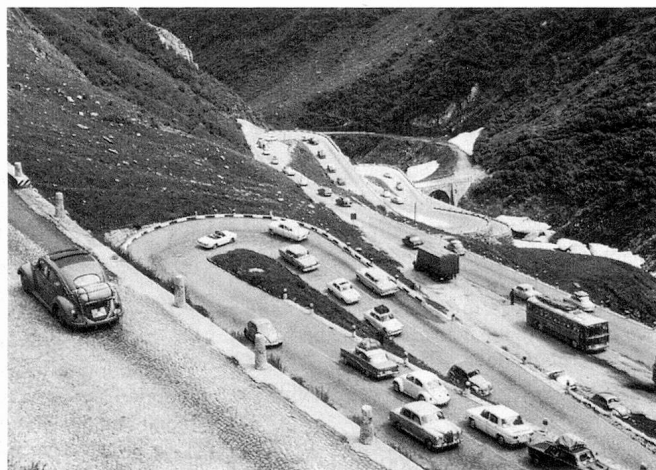
With the opening of the Gotthard road tunnel the motorway – the N2 – Basle–Chiasso has become the most important Alpine transverse. Yet some intermediate parts are still not completed, and it will be 1987 before the whole N2 is operational. The gaps near Varenzo near Airolo and Gorduno near Bellinzona are causing a lot of trouble to politi-

View of the tunnel entrance on the Ticino side.
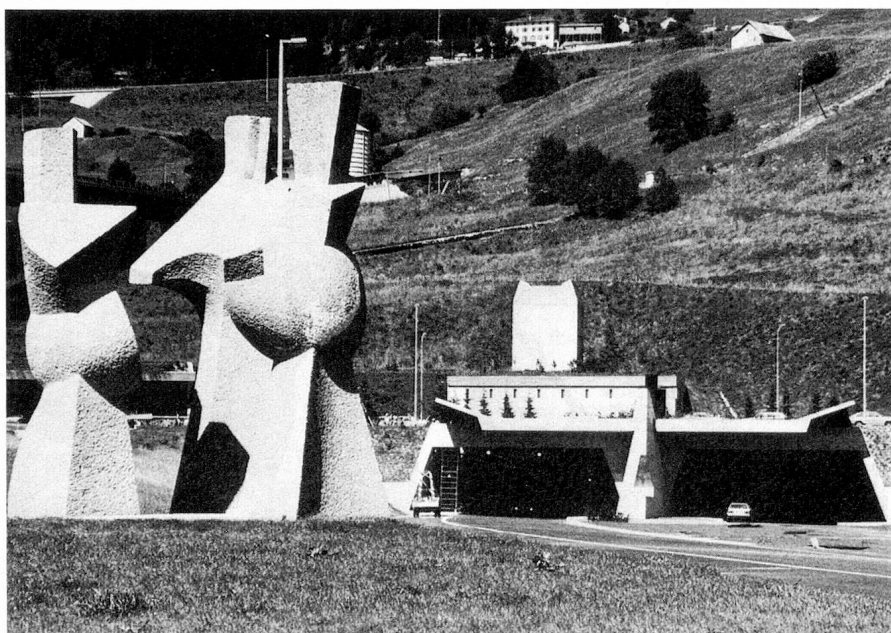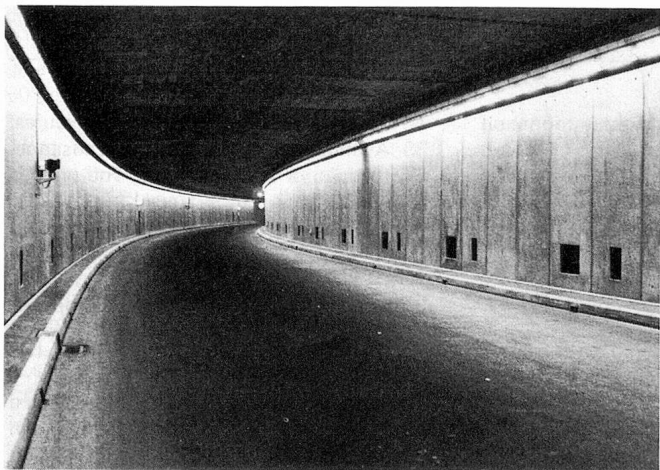
The interior of the tunnel.

Above Airolo before the opening of the tunnel (Photos Keystone).

cians, traffic experts and local population; for the Gotthard traffic still has to go painfully and slowly through the winding cantonal roads of the Leventina. It is the lorry traffic which is feared most, and one hopes to confine it to the railway tunnel by limiting the weigth to 28 tons and restricting the time of driving through the tunnel. Whilst the transport of cars by train was stopped when the road tunnel was opened, the traffic of heavy vehicles on the rails, the so-called «Huckepack System», is to be encouraged.

The two adjoining Cantons are not altogether happy either about the opening of the road tunnel. The Canton of Uri can now be traversed by car in less than half an hour, and many of the inhabitants who depend on passing tourist traffic, fear the loss of their source of income. The Canton of Ticino want to counteract this «corridor traffic» by making tourism in the Ticino more individualistic and personal.

Nelly Haldi

Youth skiing camp 1981
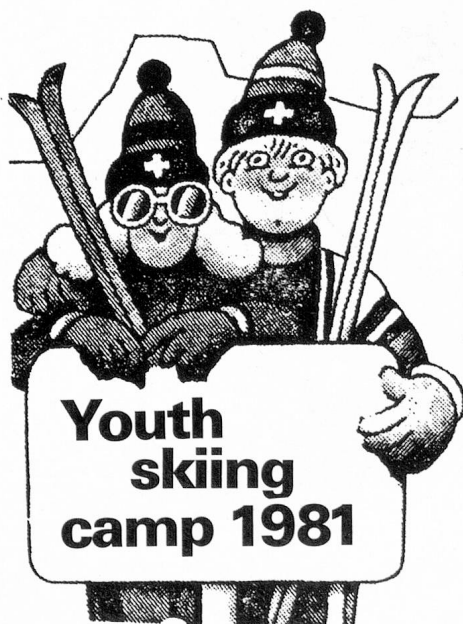
Half of the cold season is over. Here in Switzerland one has changed completely from summer bathing to winter skiing.

In order that you, too, the young Swiss from abroad, may follow this sport in your homeland, the Youth Service of the SSA is once again organizing two skiing camps in Les Crosets this year as follows:

29.3.81–7.4.81 as camp number 1
and from
7.4.81–16.4.81 as camp number 2.

If you – also as child of a Swiss mother and foreign father – are between 15 and 25, you may take part in our camps.

If you are interested in this offer, please return the slip below duly filled in to our Secretariat.

- -

Name _____ Christian name _____

Address _____ Date of birth _____

Place and country _____

Camp 1 ☐   Camp 2 ☐   (Please put a cross against the camp you wish to attend)