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The Glacier Express

Only 168 m. in 7½ hours

Year after year, ever since the opening of the Furka tunnel, the Glacier Express has been beating records. This famous train which was to link St. Moritz and Zermatt as long ago as the 1930s has become a tradition; and ever since, like a magnet, it has attracted travellers.

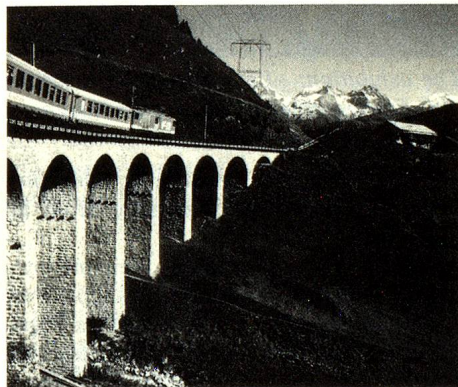
Already in the thirties, the super-train linked the fashionable resorts of St. Moritz and Zermatt with each other. The mountain train travels along the great west-east alpine furrow at the foot of the mighty «four-thousander» and glacier landscape straight out of the picture books. The «slowest express in the world» takes seven and a half hours to ply its 168-mile journey over 291 bridges and through 91 tunnels.

The number of passengers who travel on the Glacier Express is precipitously increasing. Some 130,000 travellers used it in 1986.

The secret of this success lay not only in the opening of the Furka tunnel, which enabled the line to be opened to winter operation, but also, and by no means least, in skilful marketing. «The Glacier Express as an independent product with its own signature». «The Glacier Express as the top offer of leading travel organizations in Europe, the USA and Japan». These are catchwords that denote a marketing effort which people normally associate only with consumer products. Other marketing aids are books, key-rings, wine from slanting glasses (the maximum gradient at the Oberalp is almost 18

percent) and certificates for passengers who travel the whole distance. «A market can be created for good railway products just as successfully as for consumer goods or industrial products», says Claudio Casanova, head of the commercial service of the Rhaetian Railways (RhB) which, together with the Furka-Oberalp Railway (FO) and the Brigue-Visp-Zermatt Railway (BVZ) operate this famous train.

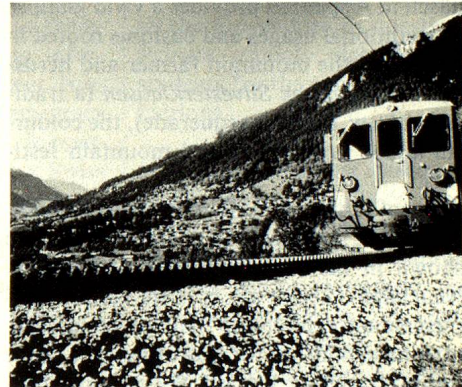
On the other hand, the Glacier Express offers advantages that speak purely for them-



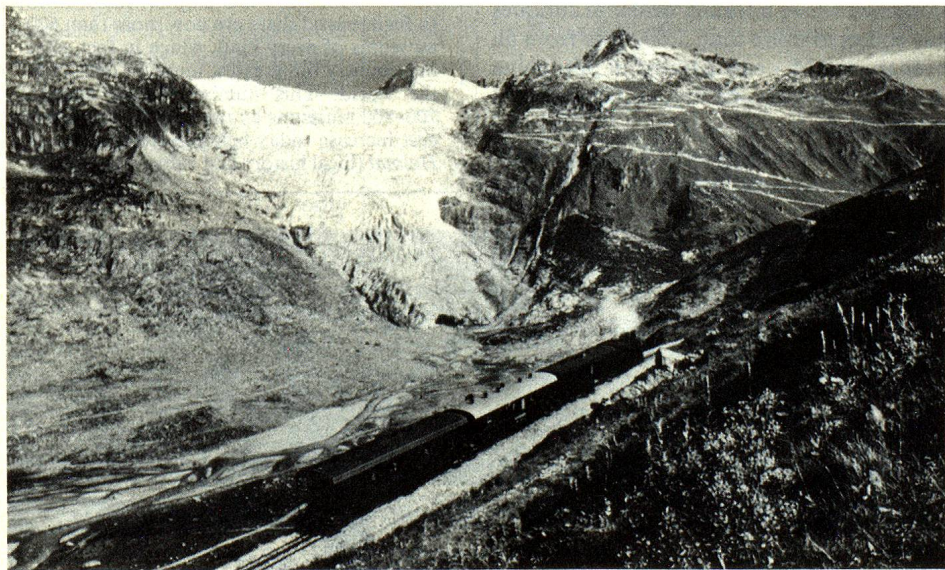
Oberalp section.

selves. First, there is the journey through a culture area in which European history has been chronicled and from which great historical names have sprung. For instance, the man from Goms, Cardinal Matthew Schiner, who got the old Swiss Confederates into hot water by the defeat in Marignano and who, in 1521, narrowly missed being elected Pope in the tenth Conclave. Or, somewhat more of this world, Caesar Ritz from Niederwald in Goms, the founder of the world-renowned hotel empire.

Then there is of course the alpine scenery where the traveller experiences the great rivers, the Rhine and the Rhône, still as lively mountain streams. Yet this is also alpine country that already lies so much to the south that the saffron crocus grows on its southernmost slopes. Little wonder, then, that traditionally the cooking is rather good in the stylish restaurant car carried by the Glacier Express. For example in *Wagon-Restaurant* n° 3814 of the RhB, built in 1928, where the St. Moritz chef, André Troxler,



The Glacier Express on the cogwheel stretch above Fiesch in the Upper Valais.



A historical photo of the Glacier Express on the closed-down Furka mountain section (in the background, the Rhône Glacier).

for once does not cook his special «sirloin in pastry» in the kitchen of a grand hotel, but in the small five-foot Glacier Express galley – «Just for the fun of it and as a sort of vocational counterbalance». And also where the three-man waiter brigade must perform feats of double-jointedness to be able to carry food and drink along the swaying, lurching floor to the tables.

Gratifying as the increasing demand is, however, it often creates wellnigh insuperable problems. Indeed, this summer the Express service will have to be run up to four times daily in each direction. Furthermore, when the train goes over to rack-and-pinion traction up the steep-gradient stretch at Oberalp, only five carriages and the restaurant car, at most, can be pulled by the locomotive.

Georges Wüthrich