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Switzerland's refurbished Transport Museum

Attractive communications turntable

What connection is there between interpreting stars in the sky and transport on earth? A great deal if you visit the Swiss Museum for Transport and Communications in Lucerne.

Mankind has long dreamed of being able to look into the future. Astrologists try to identify our character and talents from the position of the stars. Critics call this art a swindle or superstition. On the other

Alice Baumann

hand astronomical research provides breathtaking discoveries concerning the connections between human existence and the movements of the stars. Quite without bias, "Astrologic", the new planetarium programme at Lucerne's Transport Museum, demonstrates important elements of the horoscope in terms of key elements in the sky's mechanisms, such as the orbits of the sun, moon and planets through the signs of the zodiac. It also tells the story of the probable beginnings of astrology 2,500 years ago in Babylon.

For forty years

The history of the Museum for Transport and Communications is rather shorter: it goes back to 1959. In those days the most important themes were road and rail transport, and post and telecommunications; these still form the heart of the museum. Then the steamship "Rigi", set up in the courtyard, served as a restaurant – and important testimony to Swiss lake shipping. In winter visitors could have a meal in the nostalgic restaurant-car "Belle Epoque".

In a later phase there were additions: the halls concerned with air transport and space-travel, the "Cosmorama", the "Swissorama" and the "Nautirama" in the new hall for water transport, funiculars and tourism, two communications exhibits, a restaurant and the Hans Erni museum; and most recently an IMAX

cinema with a giant film projection system, and the refurbished planetarium.

More visits than other museums

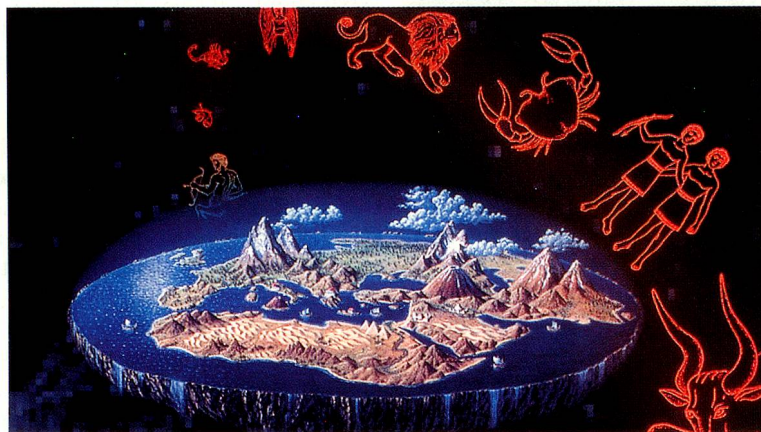
Since its opening the Swiss Museum for Transport and Communications has proved a magnet for the crowds. With 150,000 visitors in the first 6 months it quickly became the most successful and best frequented museum in Switzer-



over Sfr. 12 million. 75% came from entry fees and the takings of the kiosk and restaurant, and hire fees. The rest was subscribed by sponsors. This high degree of independent financing made the Transport Museum unique on the international museum scene.

Science and technology...

But the Transport Museum hopes in future to secure support from public



The Transport Museum in Lucerne turns the latest achievements in technology into a great experience.

(Photos: Swiss Museum for Transport and Communications)

land. In 1982 there were more than 700,000 visitors. Then the much increased availability of other leisure activities, and the failure to renew the exhibition, led to a drop in the number of visitors. After 14 years in the doldrums, with unwelcome consequences for the financial situation, the management swung the tiller: worlds were created in which the public could experience the past, the present and the future of transport and communications emotionally and come to terms with them. Further expansion is foreseen.

This renovation has done much for receipts. The museum is the responsibility of the Swiss Museum for Transport and Communications Association, which owns the collections and premises. Today there are some 22,000 members. Communities, companies and authorities are among the 650 collective members. Until the 90s members contributed about a sixth of the income of

sources. It provides work for 172 members of staff. Its claim to public support is based also on the fact that the museum undertakes research and restoration, as well as keeping scientific records. Moreover the new features in the museum's exhibits are having a positive effect: a million tickets sold for the museum and IMAX cinema in 1997 are grounds for hoping that there will be an upturn again. The current negotiations with the federal and cantonal authorities and the city of Lucerne are going well.

...and the wonders of nature

For visitors this will certainly be a good solution: lying as it does at the heart of Switzerland, despite its concentration on transport and communications, the Transport Museum also shows the vulnerability of our planet in magnificent films. ■