

Rail and road traffic in the Swiss mountains

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NEW LAW ON SWISS NATIONALITY

The new law on Swiss nationality of September 29th, 1952, has been accepted by the two Chambers of the Swiss Parliament, and as no referendum was lodged, it entered into force on January 1st, 1953.

Swiss women all over the world will be pleased to learn the following:—

Nationality of the Married Woman:

According to Art. 9 of this new law, a Swiss woman who acquires her husband's nationality by marriage may remain Swiss if she expresses the desire to retain her nationality at the time of the celebration of her marriage. Furthermore, a Swiss woman who lost her Swiss nationality by marrying an alien before the entry into force of this law, can regain the Swiss nationality by making application to the Swiss authorities within a year, i.e., before December 31st, 1953.

A woman who is Swiss by birth and who lost her nationality by marriage and who would like to regain it, should therefore inform the Swiss Consulate accordingly before the end of this year.

Loss of the Swiss Nationality Through Birth in a Foreign Country:

A child born in a foreign country of a Swiss father also born abroad, loses his Swiss nationality at the age of 22 years if he has a second nationality, unless he has made a specific request to a Swiss authority or given a written declaration that he wishes to retain his Swiss nationality.

These two Articles of the law are of the utmost importance for Swiss people living abroad, and every reader of the "Helvetia" should make them known to their Swiss friends who are not subscribers.

H. BLANCHARD,

Consul.

NOTICE TO MEMBERS

Although a little belated, the Committee of your Society wishes to extend all the best wishes for a happy and prosperous New Year. Our newly elected President, Dr. L. Bosshard, who travels occasionally through the country, will do his best to visit compatriots whenever he has the opportunity.

MEMBERSHIP FEE

The annual membership fee is due again, and to make the task of the Secretary and the collection agents easier, would you kindly attend to this matter promptly. Please remit to the Secretary or the following members attending to collections:

Mr. J. W. Risi, Ohangai R.D., Hawera, for Tara-naki.

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Mr. A. Peyer, 48 Moa Road, Auckland, W.3., for Auckland.

Mr. O. Oesch, P.O. Box 386, Wellington, for Wellington.

RAIL AND ROAD TRAFFIC IN THE SWISS MOUNTAINS

By H. O. ERNST, Manager, London Office, Swiss National Tourist Office and Swiss Federal Railways.

It may truthfully be said that both road and rail transport all over the world have, as far as regularity of service and comfort are concerned, reached a very high standard. Equipment and rolling stock have been adapted to the configuration of the country and, as far as possible, to the physical operating conditions. Transport both by road and rail at low altitudes and in comparatively flat country presents few difficulties. It is seldom and even then to a small extent affected by the forces of nature, especially unpredictable and often sudden changes in weather conditions. When we come to a mountainous country like Switzerland, these conditions alter or rather worsen with every 1000 feet elevation. It is evident that both rail and road follow the course of least resistance. They keep as far as possible to the bottom of valleys and often run parallel with mountain torrents which, when in spate, are as much a danger to transport as ice, snow and avalanches in the winter. In the British Isles there is, generally speaking, little to fear in this respect. In Switzerland, and for that matter in all countries of the alpine region, conditions are different. The danger of blocked or cut railway lines and roads is present from November until the late spring. Furthermore, heavy frost and especially ice tend to impede the normal working of signal installations and track points. Operational safety is thereby greatly reduced. Signal box, gantry—and carriage steps and platforms are slippery with ice or frozen snow and are a

danger to life and limb. Shunting is considerably slowed down. Road surfaces are covered with a coating of ice and are sometimes impracticable even for large vehicles with heavy chains. But the most serious traffic impediment is snow in its various forms and effects.

A heavy blizzard will reduce visibility to a few yards and cover signal lights in no time. Falls of snow to a depth of 5 to 6 feet in 12 hours are by no means uncommon. Strong winds either with, or following, a heavy fall often cause, especially in cuttings, an accumulation which takes heroic efforts to clear. All this may happen at comparatively low altitudes where there is little danger from avalanches. In the mountains, however, nature aids this new handicap. How real and terrible in its effect this can be was shown during the winter 1950/51 when an avalanche disaster of great magnitude overtook Switzerland, with grievous loss of life, extensive material damage and disorganisation of rail and road traffic. Avalanches are common in the alpine region. They are a natural phenomena there, but almost unknown in this country. You will, therefore, perhaps allow me to give you a rough idea how they happen and behave. I should perhaps start by mentioning that snow varies a great deal in consistency, weight and texture. Freshly fallen dry powder snow weighs roughly 30 kilos per m³. Wet snow which generally falls in large flakes may weigh as much as 120 kilos per m³. Snow is not a static material. It so to speak breathes and changes in consistency, in weight and crystalline texture under the influence of varying temperatures and other factors. This causes in any snow field interior strains and stresses. The adhesional force which make it adhere to its base, that is to say, to a grassy or rocky slope, alters constantly. Therein lies the danger.

Needless to say, and this applies both to road and rail transport in the mountains, certain precautions are taken to guard against avalanches long before the winter sets in. Some of them are permanent. Of these I shall speak later. They are, however, in themselves not sufficient.

As soon as the snow season starts, in the mountains as early as October, a very careful watch is kept on danger areas, and especially on weather conditions, variation in temperature, type and direction of the wind, etc. Nature's whims are often unpredictable, but it is possible to classify the various degrees of danger, roughly as follows:—

Air temperature under freezing-point, powder snow up to 2 feet, light wind, clear or nearly clear sky means safety.

Air temperature above freezing-point for some time, wet snow to the depth of 2 to 5 feet, light

warm wind, called "Fohn," or light rain, constitute a warning.

Air temperature consistently above 32 degrees Fahrenheit, heavy snow fall followed by rain or persistent Fohn gales, spell great danger.

Late winter, early spring, and at altitudes, early summer are therefore especially dangerous periods.

(To be continued.)

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