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HOME NEWS

"No railway undertaking of a similar character in the world has made so much progress in electrification as the Swiss Federal Railways. This year, for instance, with the conversion of an

additional 109 miles of line to electric traction, the total length worked electrically will be raised to 1,035 miles, or about 58 per cent. of the total length of the system—namely, 1,791 miles. By comparison, as recently as 1922 only 12 per cent. of the total length was electrified, so that progress has been remarkably rapid. This development has, of course, been stimulated by the excellent water-power facilities which Switzerland possesses, and it is interesting to find that, as electrification is extended, more effective use can be made of the hydro-electric installations. Electric train mileage rose in 1927 by about 25 per cent. as compared with 1926, but the cost of electric power rose by 15 per cent. only, a result which is considered to be mainly due to the more efficient utilisation of current. All the main arteries of railway traffic in Switzerland are now electrified, and of the total power required about 94 per cent. is produced by the Federal Railways Administration at its own power stations, which fall into two groups, those in the Gothard region and those in Valais. A noteworthy feature is the great fall in the cost per unit which occurred as the scale of electrification was extended so swiftly. Conditions have been fairly normal in this matter since 1924, and a comparison starting from that year shows a sharp fall in the cost of energy from 9½ centimes per kw.-hour in 1924 to 5½ centimes in 1927. It is estimated that the saving in fuel costs resulting from electrification has been very large.

The nature of the territory served, the benefits of recent electrification and the introduction of improved travel facilities have served to shield the Swiss railways from the full severity of the road competition experienced by railways in many other parts of the world. In fact, such competition as has been encountered appears to have affected freight traffic rather than passenger business, for the proportion of gross railway revenue derived from the latter class of business has actually risen slightly of recent years—from 33 per cent. in 1924 to over 36 per cent. in 1927. On the other hand, the ratio of freight revenue to the total has fallen over the same period from 60 per cent. to 55 per cent. The total receipts of the system in 1927 were 395 million francs, and the administration estimates that were it not for automobile competition they would have been 36 millions larger. Partial reductions of freight tariffs have, however, had a good effect on the financial position of the system, for they have led to a big rise in the tonnage transported, which was 17,813,000 in 1927, a steady rise from 13,245,000 tons in 1922 and very sensibly above the 12,887,000 tons carried in 1914, when the effects of war were being felt. At 12½ francs per ton, the average receipts from freights in 1927 were lower than for many years, owing to reduced charges, but, as a result of satisfactory growth in traffic, the total freight receipts are among the best recorded in the history of the system. Passenger receipts, moreover, set up a fresh high record, and there is no doubt that the enterprising advertising policy which the administration adopts in order to attract foreign tourists is a powerful factor in this satisfactory display. After allowing for working expenses, which are being kept well within bounds, and for debt interest, which has been growing rather rapidly of late, the surplus from 1927 operations was 21,000,000 francs, the second best result since before 1914, and practically as good a surplus as that realised in 1913, when debt charges were very much smaller."

Rhine Navigation.

From the *Engineer* (May 25th) :—

"The conflict of interests between the canalisation of the Rhine and the construction of the lateral canal between Strasburg and Kembs appeared to have been settled by the Swiss approval of the latter undertaking which involves the construction of a barrage near Kembs and the carrying out of protection works at Basle. A start had already been made upon the Kembs section of the lateral canal. It has been known for a long time past that Germany has not given up the idea of canalising the Rhine between Strasburg and Basle, notwithstanding the cost of removing the Istein rack, and it is now reported that negotiations have been resumed between Germany and Switzerland whereby both countries will share the cost of canalising the Rhine between Strasburg and Kembs, while Switzerland will undertake the necessary works between Basle and Lake Constance. It is obvious that there is no necessity for both undertakings, and that if the Rhine were rendered navigable for barges of big tonnage the success of the Alsace Canal would be seriously compromised. On the other hand, Switzerland desires a free waterway to the sea without being obliged to utilise a canal in French territory, and the whole question resolves itself into whether it is to the interest of Switzerland to spend huge sums of money on the Rhine or to take advantage of the Alsace Canal, which, moreover, is likely to occupy very many years in construction. The possibility of canalising the Rhine long before the canal is likely to be terminated is a point that strongly influences

Swiss opinion. The report of the negotiations between Switzerland and Germany has uncomfortably surprised the French, who affirm that the canalisation of the Rhine will prove an extremely costly undertaking in view of the constant erosion of the river bed and the discovery of other rock obstructions, and that when the work is completed the current of the river will be so strong as to necessitate the employment of powerful tugs between Strasburg and Switzerland. German engineers, however, declare that they are perfectly convinced of being able to make the Rhine a safe waterway for heavy traffic. For the moment, the French propose to construct the Kembs section of the canal for the sake of the power station which will be erected there, and probably some compromise will be attempted before the remainder of the work is put in hand."

About Mountaineering.

An interesting correspondence has these last few days appeared in the English Press, raised by a letter of Lord Strathseay, who expressed regret that the epic English pioneering spirit to which the exploration of the Alps and the popularity of Switzerland as a tourist centre owe so much, is being sacrificed to passing pastimes of modern times. The following article from the *Daily Telegraph* (June 1st) contributed by Julian Grande endeavours to give the reasons for this change of mentality :—

"There is no doubt whatever that since the war there has been a noticeable decline in the number of English climbers, and the reason for this is easily explained. To my personal knowledge alone, at least a dozen young Englishmen, who were beginning their apprenticeship as climbers in the Alps in the summer of 1914, were killed in the war or so badly wounded as to be now unfit for mountain climbing. Many others who, before the war, could afford to spend a holiday in the Alps, belong now to the "new poor" and can no longer afford it, for mountaineering proper is an expensive sport. The few British climbers who are still to be seen in well-known climbing centres, like Zermatt, Grindelwald or Chamonix in the Mont Blanc range, are generally of the old guard, very often men who have passed their three score years and ten.

Perhaps one reason why so many university men no longer go in for the pastime of mountaineering in Switzerland is that there are no more new ascents or virgin peaks to climb, and, moreover, the Alpine huts are no longer places of refuge or rest for the real climber. At night these huts are frequently overcrowded by tourists who do not climb, and by parties of young people who go to the Alps to dance to the accompaniment of a gramophone jazz record. A climber, who has to get up at one o'clock in the morning for a difficult ascent, seldom gets the chance of a few hours' sleep owing to the noisy, careless crowd who have taken possession of the hut.

Nevertheless, a walking tour in the Alps over the magnificent passes, spending the nights in hotels, is certainly one of the most healthful and delightful ways of spending a holiday, and far less of a strain on the constitution, or the purse, than climbing proper. To employ guides for high ascents is quite an expensive business, as to engage one guide for a fortnight means at least £25 in "fees," and there is, besides, his keep during that time. The cost of outfit and equipment for mountaineering must also be taken into consideration. A pair of climbing boots, for instance, will cost to-day 4 guineas, whereas before the war 35s. was the average price; and other mountaineering equipment, such as a climbing suit, puttees, gloves, ice-axe, rucksacks, etc., has all gone up 50 to 70 per cent. in price.

Similarly as regards provisions. Before the war a roast chicken, to be carried up to the hut, cost about 10f. (8s.), whereas last summer, when I ordered one at the hotel where I was staying I found it put down in my bill at 25f., exactly £1. It is true that mountaineering has always been an expensive sport, if gone in for seriously. But now it has become so costly that the professional class, who used to be amongst the first climbers, can no longer afford it. Walking tours, on the other hand, to which I referred, can be made in the Alps without the inconvenience of having to spend the night in a mountain hut, or being obliged to employ a guide or guides.

The kind of walking to which I refer is that along mountain paths and over easy passes, keeping at heights varying from 3,000ft. to 10,000ft. I do not mean walking below in the valleys, which are always more or less close and stuffy in summer, and where the air is not invigorating. Moreover, except in a few places, such as Zermatt and Saas Fée, which motor-cars cannot reach, the pleasure of walking through a valley or along the high road in summer is apt to be spoiled by the dust raised by motor traffic. From Zermatt, Grindelwald, Saas Fée and Kandertegg, it is possible to make daily excursions over paths which it is still a delight to tread. For instance, there is the walk from Grindelwald to the Faulhorn, returning over the Schynige Platte. The Alpine meadows along this walk are

still much as they must have been a hundred years ago, although in some parts, within reach of marauding hands, certain of the rarer and more delicate flowers have become almost extinct. Most of the varieties of Alpine flowers, however, to be found in the meadows and on the rocks near the summit of the Schynige Platte, grow in such profusion that the hand of the tourist seems to have had little effect upon them.

From few centres of the Alps is there a greater variety of easy ascents than from Zermatt, and this place is, moreover, fortunate enough to have, on the whole, good weather throughout the summer season, whereas in other Alpine resorts fine weather is not so prevalent. Saas Fée is a good training ground for beginners who intend to become climbers. As yet no mountain railway runs to Saas Fée, or in the neighbourhood; not even an old-fashioned diligence or carriage can get there; on foot, or on the back of a mule, is the only way of reaching Saas Fée after one alights from the little railway station of Stalden, on the Visp-Zermatt mountain railway. During the months of July and August this place is crowded, and it is advisable to reserve accommodation in advance. For that matter, this applies to most mountaineering centres, and those who take their holidays in June will find not only the hotels less expensive and less crowded, but the country looking its best. The wild flowers are certainly a great asset to Swiss scenery. The lower slopes above Montreux are extraordinarily beautiful in the spring, covered as they are with dense masses of snowy narcissus of the pheasant-eyed variety."

A Railway Museum.

The existence of a railway museum at Zurich is probably known to but few of our readers; a short description appeared in the *Railway Gazette* (June 1st) :—

"The Zurich Railway Museum is accommodated in a building which forms part of the goods station. The first section is devoted to the construction of the St. Gothard line, and in this room are to be seen not only all the plans for this line, but even perforators and other machinery used in its construction, geological maps, plaster reliefs of the region, models of shelters against avalanches, photographs of the district, and the medal struck to commemorate the opening of the St. Gothard.

The second room has an imposing model of the station of St. Gall, and the third contains all the time-tables issued in Switzerland since trains were first run. Some of them are very amusing, especially an illustrated one of the Zurich-Baden line, calling attention to the great advantages accruing to a poor gouty subject from a stay at Baden and a cure in its sulphur baths. This room also contains specimens of posters advertising Swiss railways from the earliest times.

Engineers find the room devoted to the construction of viaducts and bridges full of interest, as there are very fine models of the best iron and concrete work in Switzerland, as well as engaging little models of the old wooden bridges first used. The engine room has models of steam engines from the first locomotive ever used in 1847 (which was on view at Berne in the 1914 exhibition) up to the stately monsters of the very latest type. Different types of brakes also figure largely in this section, and various technical gadgets such as tachometers, in different stages of perfection, attract the attention. Two rooms are devoted to the evolution of electric traction, and comprise photographs, drawings, plans and models of every invention and device that has helped to speed up the Swiss electrification.

The archives of the Museum comprise documents of great value, both from a juridic and engineering point of view. These papers cover the whole period from the beginning of railways in Switzerland up to the present time, and afford an exhaustive survey of railway activity in all its branches since 1847."

On Swiss Alpine Roads.

A very handy and excellently illustrated booklet has been issued by the Saurer company describing the mail and passenger service maintained with the aid of their vehicles on the alpine roads by the Swiss postal authorities. On application to the London offices at 21, Augustus Street, Albany Street, N.W.1., readers of the *Swiss Observer* may obtain the booklet free of charge, also from the offices of the *Swiss Observer*.

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