

Zeitschrift: The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

Herausgeber: Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

Band: - (1931)

Heft: 495

Rubrik: Notes and gleanings

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. [Siehe Rechtliche Hinweise.](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. [Voir Informations légales.](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. [See Legal notice.](#)

Download PDF: 02.03.2025

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By KYBURG.

Through the Heart of the Alps by the Glacier Express:
Railway Magazine

To our minds an "express" which takes some 10½ hours to complete a journey of but 167½ miles might hardly seem deserving of any such title. But when it is mentioned that the train in question starts at an altitude of 5,844 ft., finishes its journey at 5,415 ft., and on its way is found at successive heights of 5,998, 1,995, 6,720, 4,740, 7,120 and 2,140 ft., the reader will realise that this is a journey of altogether exceptional characteristics. It is furthermore, the longest through journey which can be made over metre-gauge railways in Europe, and is over a single-track route for the whole of its length. Yet another record is that this train links up in one journey the watersheds of the Danube, the Rhine and the Rhone, with their waters flowing respectively to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean.

Three railways are concerned in the working of the "Glacier Express"—the prosperous Rhaetian Railways of the Swiss Canton of the Grisons; the Furka-Oberalp Railway; and the Visp-Zermatt Railway, which in 1930 was extended for 5½ miles up the Rhone Valley—parallel to the Simplon main line—to Brigue, at the mouth of the Simplon Tunnel, where a junction was effected with the Furka-Oberalp line. This has made possible the running of through coaches between St. Moritz, in the Engadine, and Zermatt, a distance of 163 miles, the train concerned being known as the "Glacier Express," even though its average speed works out at the modest figure of but 15 miles an hour. Two other metre-gauge railways are also connected with this narrow-gauge Swiss system—the Schöllenen Railway, coming up from Göschenen, at the mouth of the St. Gotthard Tunnel, to join the Furka-Oberalp Railway at Andermatt; and the Bernina Railway, which climbs from the Italian frontier at Tirano over the Bernina Pass to link with the Rhaetian system at Pontresina and St. Moritz. By means of the latter it would be possible to run a through coach from Tirano to Zermatt, a distance of almost exactly 200 miles, by metre gauge throughout. Not only so, but the watershed of the River Po, draining into the Adriatic, would be added on the one journey to those of the Danube, Rhine and Rhone; and an ascent from 1,405 ft. at Tirano to 7,400 ft. on the Bernina Pass, to the dizzy alternations of altitude already mentioned.

We will assume that our journey by the "Glacier Express" is in the westbound direction, and so is being begun at St. Moritz, at 8.15 in the morning. Actually only one through coach is run, a first and second class composite, attached to a train running from St. Moritz to Chur, the capital of the Grisons, where connection is made with the standard-gauge lines of the Swiss Federal system. As with all the principal trains on this service, a restaurant car is attached, of the type introduced in recent years on both the Rhaetian and Bernina systems by the Mitropa Company of Germany. On leaving St. Moritz, we proceed down the wide Valley of the Inn—the famous Engadine—as far as Samaden, where the branch from Pontresina joins the main line, and through coaches from there for Chur are attached to our train; one mile further on, at Bevers, we are joined by the 30½-mile branch which has come up from Schuls-Tarasp, the well-known spa of the Lower Engadine. We are now to leave the Danube watershed, in order to cross under the crest of the Albula Pass to that of the Rhine, and take a farewell of the 13,000-ft. summits of the Bernina group, such as the Piz Palü and Piz Roseg, towering across the valley to the southward.

Shortly after leaving Bevers, the train enters, at Spinass, the Albula Tunnel. In the centre of the tunnel—which is perfectly straight, and through which it is possible to see from end to end, despite its length of 3¼ miles—the railway is 5,998 ft. above sea-level. Great difficulties were experienced in the completion of this bore, which is one of the longest narrow-gauge tunnels in the world, owing to the high altitude; one of the worst troubles was the tapping at various points of springs of ice-cold water, which at one stage caused an interruption of fifteen months in the work on the northern side. After coping successfully with these irruptions, the engineers succeeded in gradually increasing their average progress from 190 to 239 ft. per day, and the whole tunnel was finished in less than four years, between 1898 and 1902. It cost £282,000.

Some of the most remarkable railway location work in Europe is seen as the train descends the abrupt Albula Valley. Between Preda, at the north end of the tunnel, and Bergün, the direct distance between which is

4 miles, there is a drop of 1,368 ft. in altitude, which the railway requires 7¼ miles of track, inclined continuously at 1 in 29, to overcome. Entering Zuondra Tunnel, the line curves round in a complete spiral, and after exit crosses and recrosses the valley, to enter a spiral tunnel—Tona—immediately below the first. Crossing the valley again, the track is carried through Rognux spiral tunnel and recrosses for the second time; then, high up above but in full view of Bergün, it describes an immense loop on the open mountainside before the train finally gets down abreast of the village. Another spiral tunnel has to be negotiated ere the train reaches Filisur, 24 miles from St. Moritz, and the junction for the loop which travels up the Landwasser Valley to Davos, and reaches Chur by way of Klosters and Landquart. Here we are 3,553 ft. above the sea.

The main line now pierces a short tunnel, and is immediately launched on one of the most striking engineering features of the whole route—the viaduct over the Landwasser gorge. This springs from a sheer precipice, into the wall of which the first arch is built. With its height of 213 ft. and the radius of 328 ft. on which it has been built, this viaduct is a sensational structure indeed. Another remarkable engineering work is the bridge across the Albula ravine at Solis, also built in masonry—which material has been employed wherever possible, in order that these great viaducts may harmonise with the scenery in which they are placed—with 11 arches, of which the central one, 138 ft. in span, carries the rails at a height of 292 ft. above the rushing river. The track is then carried through the abyssal Schyn ravine, from which it emerges at Thusis, crossing the Hinter Rhein by a steel bridge 263 ft. long just before entering the station. The Rhein at this point flows out of an even more extraordinary gorge—the Via Mala—of which the sides, 1,600 ft. high, are in places so close together that they could both be touched by the same pair of outspread arms. Thusis, 38½ miles from St. Moritz and 2,300 ft. above sea-level, marks the end of the Albula Railway proper, which, apart from the Albula Tunnel itself, was completed at the remarkable moderate cost of £9,400 per mile. A short run down the Rhine Valley now brings us to the confluence of the two sources of the Rhine—the Hinter Rhein and the Vorder Rhein—at Reichenau-Tamins, 49½ miles from St. Moritz, at 10.40 a.m., and here we part company with the Chur train, which continues down the valley to the capital.

Meanwhile, the Disentis train, also restaurant-car equipped, has left Chur at 10.24 a.m., and reaches Reichenau at 10.39 a.m., to this the "Glacier Express" coach is attached, and having already descended the Hinter Rhein valley, we now start, at 10.43 a.m., to ascend that of the Vorder Rhein, from our comparatively low level of 1,995 ft. above the sea. The chief engineering feature of this section is the passage of the railway through the deep ravine which the river has carved out for itself through the prehistoric landslip of Plims. The precipitous sides of this valley do not consist of rock, but of the rubble and debris of the landslip, and from this stones often fall in the spring. The railway has, therefore, had to be protected, partly by the preservation of a space between the track and the cliff, into which the stones may fall, and partly by building the track in the bed of the river, which is very broad here, with the further protection of large masonry dykes. So we are carried past Ilanz up to Disentis, 30½ miles from Reichenau and 80 miles from St. Moritz, where we are due at 12.1 noon. Our time to this point has been 3¾ hours, and the average speed 21 m.p.h., stops included.

At Disentis the Rhaetian Railways hand our coach over to the Furka-Oberalp Railway. For the next 5½ miles steam is to take the place of electricity as the motive power, and in consequence of the terrific gradients, loads must be drastically limited, and the restaurant car is now dispensed with; the maximum formation of the "Glacier Express" is the through coach, with a couple of third-class coaches and a brake-van of the Furka-Oberalp Company. On leaving Disentis, at 12.10 noon, we are at an altitude of 3,760 ft., and now commence the short but toilsome ascent of the Oberalp Pass; we have to climb to 6,720 ft. altitude in a distance of 12 miles, two lengths of rack-and-pinion propulsion, on the Abt system, being used *en route*. In the midst of wild scenery the train skirts the lake known as Oberalpsee, and after passing the village of Oberalp has an even more abrupt descent to Andermatt, the rack-equipped track sweeping to and fro in two great loops on the open hillside for 5 miles to bring the train down to 4,740 ft. altitude at Andermatt Station, where we are due at 1.43 p.m.

Almost immediately below us here, roughly 1,000 ft. down under the rock, is the St.

Gothard Tunnel. But the Schöllenen Railway now links the St. Gotthard main line at Göschenen with the Furka-Oberalp Railway at Andermatt, and by another service a through coach is run in summer from Göschenen to Zermatt, affording a new and popular scenic route from the Lake of Lucerne resorts to the Rhone Valley. We are still in the Rhine watershed at Andermatt, as the Reuss is a tributary of the Rhine, but in the next stage of the journey we have to cross into the Rhone watershed by way of the Furka Pass. The 31½-mile stretch from Disentis to Gletsch, with Andermatt at the midway point, includes both passes, and is the most difficult part of the route. The departure from Andermatt is at 1.50 p.m.

It is on the rack-and-pinion ascent from Hosphenthal, a mile further on, to the Furka that the traveller passes over—though probably unaware of its existence—the most original engineering work on the whole journey. It is the Steffenbach bridge. The gorge which it spans is swept throughout the wintertime—when, save for winter sport trains from Andermatt up to Oberalp, the Furka-Oberalp Railway is closed to traffic between Oberwald, in the Rhone Valley, and Sedrun, near Disentis—by destructive avalanches, which in two successive winters swept away the bridge which had been erected over it. At the next replacement the engineer of the line determined to get the better of Nature. And this he has done by designing a bridge of unique type, which takes to pieces and packs away for the winter!

The photographs reproduced make clear how this is done. The central span is hinged at one end, and when the time for dismantling arrives, is unbolted at the opposite end and swung round towards the diagonal support. Each of the diagonals is also hinged at the base, and the next operation is to lift both of the side spans at their abutment ends and to draw them back on to the track at the sides of the gorge. The diagonals are thus drawn round until they lie flat against the abutment walls, against one of which, also, the central span then hangs vertically. Thus the whole gorge is now left completely open, and the avalanches can sweep down in the winter time without causing a moment's concern. Before the resumption of service, in the late spring or early summer, the engineers descend upon the bridge, and by aid of the cranes erected permanently at both ends, draw the spans out from their resting-places, bolt them together, and in a very short time the line is again ready for traffic. Truly "necessity is the mother of invention"!

In the Furka Tunnel, which is 7,120 ft. above sea-level, though still 870 ft. below the summit of the pass, the train passes from the Rhine watershed to that of the Rhone; the length of the tunnel is 2,138 yards. Then follows the thrilling descent for 2½ miles to Gletsch, in full view of the mighty Rhone Glacier, and, of course, by aid of the rack throughout, until we pull up in Gletsch Station, 1,410 ft. below the Furka Tunnel, at 3.5 p.m., the last 13½ miles having been allowed 75 min. It is here that the motor route over the Grimsel Pass is seen across the valley.

Now follows the long descent of the Rhone Valley, for 28¾ miles to Brigue. We leave Gletsch at 3.10 p.m., and run down to Oberwald, the first village of any size in the valley, and the limit of the train service from Brigue in winter; this is a distance of 3 miles, 2½ of which are rack-and-pinion equipped, as there is a drop of 1,215 ft. between these points. There are various other shorter rack-and-pinion lengths, including one near Fiesch, where the line makes a wide loop round the lateral Fiescher Valley, and another near Grengtols, where we pass through a spiral tunnel. Shortly before Brigue the mouth of the great Simplon Tunnel is seen to the South of the train, and presently the Furka-Oberalp Railway sweeps round across the Rhone, and under the Lötschberg and Simplon main lines, to come round into the south side of the International Station at Brigue, which we reach at 4.55 p.m., having completed 140 miles of the journey.

At Brigue steam gives place to electricity, and the "Glacier Express" is handed over to the Visp-Zermatt Railway. Since the connecting link between this line and the Furka-Oberalp Railway was opened in 1930 over the 5½ miles from Brigue to Visp, both railways have come under the same management. No connections are made from the Italian direction at Brigue, but an excellent connection is made with the express which has arrived from Berne, *via* the Lötschberg line and Kandersteg, at 4.40 p.m. So we leave at 5 p.m. for Zermatt, and after the brief run down to Visp, where we are down to a level of but 2,140 ft. above the sea, we pick up more passengers who have come up the Rhone Valley from the Lake of Geneva direction, and have ar-

rived there at 4.29 p.m. A short halt at Visp, and we leave for Zermatt at 5.20 p.m. No stop is scheduled over this final 21½ miles of the journey, although there is little scope for speed on the climb ahead, with its rack-and-pinion sections, and the 95 min. schedule normally allotted to stopping trains is worked to.

There are no engineering features of note on the Zermatt line, but there is some incomparable scenery. With the beautiful snow pyramid of the Balfrin, 12,474 ft. high, ahead of us, we mount to Stalden, where the valley forks, the left-hand branch ascending to the favourite resort of Saas-Fee, which cannot yet be reached by rail. The railway, however, takes the right-hand valley, or Nikolai-Tal, crossing to and fro over the rushing Matter Visp, through a profound gorge to the village of St. Niklaus, which is so shut in by the tremendous mountains on both sides of the valley that for several weeks in the winter the sun never succeeds in reaching the village at all. As we pass Randa and Täsch—names beloved of mountaineers—we have immediately on the east of us the highest purely Swiss mountains in the Alps, Dom and Täschhorn in the Mischabel group, 14,942 and 14,758 ft. high, while the west side is lined with such giants as the Weisshorn, the Mettelhorn and others. Glaciers are in view on every hand. Finally, the great cone of the Matterhorn, the "lion" of Zermatt, 14,780 ft. high, comes into sight as we round a mountain shoulder just before reaching Zermatt, and we draw up in the famous mountain resort at 6.55 p.m., in nice time for dinner. The complete journey of 167½ miles has taken 10 hrs. 40 min., and although this only works out at an average of 15.7 m.p.h., given a fine day no one would seek any acceleration of this speed, in view of the unrivalled spectacular attractions of the route.

In the reverse direction the "Glacier Express" is booked to leave Zermatt at 7.30 a.m., and to reach Brigue at 9.15 a.m.; 15 min. later the journey is resumed, the arrival times on the Furka-Oberalp section being 11.20 a.m. at Gletsch, 12.28 p.m. at Andermatt and 2.12 p.m. at Disentis. From here the Raetian Company provide a restaurant car to Reichenau, leaving Disentis at 2.25 and reaching Reichenau at 3.45 p.m., where another restaurant car train is waiting to convey the "Glacier Express" through coach to St. Moritz, the capital of the Engadine being attained at 6.20 p.m., after a journey 10 min. longer than that in the reverse direction. During its course a total "vertical rise" of no less than 11,000 ft. has been surmounted, and the astonished passenger may well settle down in one or other of the delectable holiday centres at its two ends while he recovers his breath from such Alpine railway achievements as these.

HEIMAT.

Ich zog, ein wander-froh' Geselle,
Durch fremde Dörfer, fremde Städte;
Mir war, klang noch mein Lied so helle,
Ob ich etwas verloren hätte.

Dann plötzlich starb, ich war erschrocken,
Das Wanderlied mir in der Kehle;
Der letzte Ton drang aus der Seele
Wie weher Klang gesprungner Glocken.

Da zog ich heim. Als deine Gauen
Im Abendsonnengolde stunden,
Konnt' ich vom Berg dich wieder schauen,
Und alle Trauer war verschwunden.

Anton Bülsterli.

"FUNNY CUTS."

"I am a woman of few words," announced the haughty mistress to the new maid. "If I beckon with my finger, that means 'Come'."

"Suits me, mum," replied the girl. "I'm a woman of few words myself. If I shake my head, that means I ain't comin'."

Standing at the entrance to a large estate in the country were two large dogs carved out of granite. A tourist, thinking to have some fun with a native asked him.

"How often do they feed those two big dogs?"

"Whenever they bark, sir," was the reply.

He found his hair was leaving the top of his head, and took his barber to task about it.

"You sold me two bottles of stuff to make my hair grow."

"It is very strange that it won't grow again," said the barber. "I can't understand it."

"Well, look here," said the man. "I don't mind drinking another bottle, but it must be the last!"

NEWS FROM THE COLONY.



CHARLES CHAPUIS

LATE PRESIDENT
of the
CITY SWISS CLUB.

We have much pleasure in publishing the portrait of M. Ch. Chapuis, whose term of office, as President of the City Swiss Club, has come to an end last Tuesday.

For many years, Mr. Chapuis was President of the Entertainment Committee of the Swiss Mercantile Society of which institution he is an Honorary Member.

Amongst the many offices which Mr. Chapuis held and still holds are:—Hon. Treasurer of the Committee of the Fête Suisse, Delegate on Advisory Board of the Employment Dept. of the Swiss Mercantile Society, etc., etc.

We also wish to put it on record that he was the happy originator of the Entertainment given to wounded soldiers by the Swiss Colony during the War.

SWISS CHORAL SOCIETY.

The Swiss Choral Society announces its Annual Concert for May the 1st, which we consider a most appropriate date.

Can the beautiful spring time be heralded in better than on "Wings of songs." We learn that the programme will consist of songs which will gladden everyone's heart, and satisfy even the most severe critic, and we feel sure that all those who will wend their way to Conway Hall on that day, will spend a most enjoyable evening.

There is no need to enlarge on the merits of this most active Society, they have given innumerable proofs of what they are able to do, and they have given us untold pleasures. To many of our compatriots, who, through one reason or another were unable to visit the green hills of our beloved country, they have brought back cherished memories of long ago.

We are furthermore informed that the Society has been able to engage solists of great reputation, which will no doubt add greatly to the attractiveness of the evening.

The Swiss Choral Society has given their help in a commendable manner to many of the functions in the Colony, is it too much to ask that they should now reap the benefit of their unselfish collaboration? They have set their hearts on filling the Hall and we make an earnest appeal to all our readers to help them to realize their ambition, they well deserve it.

It is hoped that all the passive members of the Society will bring along their friends, both Swiss and English, to show them that in "Song Land" Switzerland does not lag behind any other nation.

Therefore keep your date free on May the 1st and join the happy pilgrimage to Conway Hall, you will not regret it.

SWISS ATTRACTIONS.

A correspondent writes:

"If there are any of us who cannot manage a real holiday in Switzerland this year, the sight of a new film which the Universal people are soon to launch will be something of a compensation. It is called 'A Song of Switzerland' and is full of Alpine scenery, Alpine stations and Alpine types. The star is natural and unspoiled. I am not personally a great admirer of the "100% talking ladies" from Hollywood, and the standard of their singing it is better not to discuss. What I liked about what I saw of 'A Song of Switzerland' was that it seemed to have nothing whatever to do with Hollywood; the singing of the Guides and village folk was real Swiss singing, and the mountains were real Swiss mountains—and how beautifully do they photograph!

The film will be released soon, now; and the première, at which I hear some important people of the Swiss Colony will be present, will be at the Marble Arch Pavilion, W.

CK'S CORNER.

The Swiss Observer is going to start a new feature which it hopes will be a success and will interest that important section of the public, the readers, regular or occasional, of this paper.

The powers that watch over its destinies have decided to reserve from time to time a space in the paper for the benefit of ck who will be allowed to air his views on most subjects and to give his advice on the way in which the universe should be conducted in general and on matters which he thinks will be interesting to the readers of the Swiss Observer in particular. This will, of course, be counted to me as presumption and will in due time, no doubt, evoke numerous letters to the Editor, much to the Editor's delight as he seeketh diligently after copy.

I am incited to give utterance to the above remark after reading the last two numbers of the S.O. for when I came across ST's article I was almost sure that he would get into trouble and so he did. Such is the ingratitude of the human race. ST takes the trouble to write TWO AND A HALF COLUMNS and then as a reward he is told that his taste is low, bordering almost on vulgarity. Poor ST. And yet I am consoled for I seem to remember that the same epithets were applied to some of my own efforts about a year or two ago. So I am in good company, and I feel strengthened and encouraged for goodness only knows what is going to happen to me after I have written a few more articles.

In the meantime, I feel rather nervous about ST as I do not think he has improved matters with his second article. But I would ask those who find criticism so facile to sit down and endeavour to write two and a half columns. Personally, when I have done half a column, I consider I have done very well, but of course, it is very much easier and more satisfactory to go for the other fellow. I often think of all the scathing things I could say about Kyburg, but as he never replies (wise man) I generally write a lovely article and then put it into the wastepaper basket instead of posting it to Leonard Street. However, be of good cheer, ST. Sursum corda. And we will see what we can do in the future.

And now for a few remarks about ck's corner. I have got a lot of beautiful ideas. Of course, I must not tell you what they are; for the pleasure of a surprise would then be gone and you would not be able to open your copy of the S.O. to read with a superior air the nonsense that fellow ck writes or take up your pen in righteous indignation to tell the Editor that he should buy a new pair of scissors and a new blue pencil and a new pot of paste and a new brush and do a little censoring and thus keep the S.O. up to that intellectual standard required by such an intellectual race and remember the world-wide reputation and not sully the fair name nor besmirch the white pages of the S.O., etc., etc., etc.

I wonder if by this time I have written enough to satisfy the Editor. The bad man never told me how many words he required.

However, in order to celebrate the inauguration of ck's corner, I am going to offer a prize for the first correct solution received at the Offices of the S. O. to the following devinette.

Mon premier est une partie du corps. Mon second ne convient guère à une Sainte. Mais mon tout est très convenable pour un Saint.

The usual conditions should be observed and the Editor's decision, or rather ck's decision will be final. There is no entrance fee and no duplicate tickets will be issued. This competition is suitable for persons of all ages and children in arms may compete. The solution will be published in the columns of the S.O. in due course.

C. E. SCHNEIDER-HALL.†

We regret to inform our readers of the sudden death, which occurred in Switzerland, of Mr. C. E. Schneider-Hall.

The interment took place at Basle on Monday last. Mr. Schneider-Hall was Joint Managing Director of the European and General Express Co., Ltd., of 37, Upper Thames Street, E.C.4., and had been a member of the City Swiss Club since 1927.

SWISS MERCANTILE SOCIETY.

The Swiss Mercantile Society, Limited, was registered on April 9th as a company limited by guarantee, without share capital, with 500 members, each liable for £1 in the event of winding-up. The income and property of the society, whencesoever derived, shall be applied solely towards the promotion of its objects. The objects are: To acquire all or part of the property and undertake all or any of the liabilities of the unincorporated Swiss Mercantile Society, of Swiss House, 34 and 35, Fitzroy Square, W. The registered office is at Swiss House, 34 and 35, Fitzroy Square, W.1.