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OFF THE BEATEN ALPINE TRACK

How many travellers in Switzerland, speeding across the canton of Valais intent upon reaching Zermatt, or perhaps going south to Italy, turn off the main motor road to explore some of the unexploited, uncommercialized Alpine valleys and villages? The roads are roughish, the villages of the simplest, but with a small amount of courage (needed to negotiate the roads) and a small amount of map-reading ability it is easy to reach the destination decided upon — and find ample reward for initiative.

One of the most charming places — and virtually unknown outside the locality — is Derborence, a village of 15 or so chalets dotted about like open books on a green carpet, as C.-F. Ramuz put it in his novel, *Derborence*. It is at the head of the valley cut by the little river Lizerne, 15 kilometres north of Sion, the capital of Valais. At the end of the valley is the Zanfleuron glacier and towering above the place are Les Diablerets, the mountains which owe their name to the family of devils which used to play skittles on the glacier in the full moon. The chalets overlook a small lake of a marvellous milky green colour.

Such a tranquil little place to have such a turbulent history — but it has.

On the eve of June 23, 1714, the pastoralists who had taken their cows up to graze in the meadows for the summer, and who lived in the 150 or so chalets which then comprised the village were troubled by queer cracking noises in the hills above them — perhaps the evil family was at its games again? The next day there was a great rending crack as the mountain split across. The wind rose, the ground trembled — and the mountain fell into the valley. All the chalets were buried. But two months later a young shepherd emerged to describe at first hand what it is like to survive an immense landslide. He had been saved because there was a huge pile of building debris in front of his chalet, which was built with its back to the rock. He had lived upon the stock of cheeses in the chalet, and had explored the cracks and crevices in the rocks above and around him, until eventually he had found a way out and returned to his native village of Aven, to tell his story.



Tranquil Charm

Thirty-five years later another landslide occurred. The rocks that were hurled down this time formed a dam across the river and so the Lac de Derborence was made. The place was abandoned. Spruce, larch, beech, maple and aspen pushed upwards undisturbed. The rocks grew a covering of moss and, in between them, sprouted small willows and blueberries and bear-berry. Left to themselves, deer, marmot, foxes and badgers multiplied in these new woods, and on the hillsides the troops of chamois grew larger. The forest and its wildlife were free from all interference. And this is what it is like today. In 1959 the forest was acquired by the Swiss League for the Protection of Nature and the "*Ligue du patrimoine national*" and is now a protected region.

There is, however, a road which runs along the mountainside above the gorges, to the head of the valley. After turning off the main road at Conthey, just outside Sion, one drives through vineyards and small farmsteads (and the people are still unsophisticated enough to wave at the car), then through orchards growing apples, pears, apricots, peaches, and quinces in abundance (Valais is sunny all the year round). The orchards give way to woods of mixed deciduous trees and conifers — mostly larch, with some spruce and pine.

Then the road cuts through the side of the mountain. In the rock walls one can see nesting crag martins until as late as the end of September, and these, as well as Alpine swifts, are common. Twelve kilometres up one meets the first of the great stones which mark the limit of the landslide. The Lizerne snakes its way across the alluvium which has accumulated there, and from spring to late autumn masses of flowers grow there, including many sorts of gentian and the glorious blue monkshood (*aconitum napellus*). At the end of the road one crosses a little plank bridge — and there is Derborence.

There is a small restaurant and a tiny hotel, very simple (no electricity or running hot water), but ready to serve visitors with plain (but adequate) meals and to offer them a comfortable bed.

As well as having its own tranquil charm, Derborence makes an excellent centre for climbers, mountain-walkers, or those who like to explore in their cars — though this means coming down on to the level again, before penetrating another valley with its little village and usually its small hotel, at the end. And at night one can be absolutely certain of peace and quiet.

[From London to Sion by rail and sea, via Folkestone and Calais, takes 18½ hours and costs £24 13s. (1st return) or £17 (2nd return). There are through carriages with sleepers and couchettes from Calais to Sion. By air to Geneva, then rail, takes 4-5 hours and costs from £22 13s. (night tourist return). Derborence is 14 miles from Sion and can be reached by postal bus or taxi.]

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DIE DIPLOMATISCHEN UND KONSULARISCHEN VERTRETUNGEN DER SCHWEIZ

Das Netz der Diplomatischen und Konsularischen Vertretungen der Schweiz umfasst 51 Botschaften, 10 Gesandtschaften, 2 Delegationen (Berlin & Oecd), 1 Büro des Schweizerischen Beobachters bei der UNO, 1 Mission bei den Europaischen Gemeinschaften, 40 General Konsulate und 60 Konsulate, und 2 Vize-Konsulate. Die Zahl der Botschaften hat letztes Jahr um 9 zugenommen und die Gesandtschaften um 4 abgenommen. Bei den Konsulaten und Vizekonsulaten ist je eine Abnahme zu verzeichnen. 35 der 102 Konsularischen Posten werden von Honorarvertretern geleitet, ferner verfügt das Eidgenössische Politische Departement über 66 Konsularagenturen.

Neue Botschaften wurden 1961 in Lagos (Zuständigkeitsbereich: Nigeria und Kamerun), in Abidjan (Zuständigkeitsbereich: Elfenbein Küste, Dahomey, Ober-Volta und Niger), in Australien, in Dakar (Zuständigkeitsbereich: Senegal und Mauretanien) eröffnet. In Khartum wurde eine Botschaft eröffnet, die durch einen interimistischen Geschäftsträger geleitet wird. Der Botschafter in Akkra wurde in gleicher Eigenschaft in Mali akkreditiert. Der Botschafter in Dschkarta wurde in derselben Eigenschaft in Malaja akkreditiert. Der auch als Gesandter in Saudiarabien akkreditierte Botschafter in Kairo wurde in Saudiarabien als Botschafter akkreditiert und die Gesandtschaft in Dscheddah in den Rang einer Botschaft erhoben. Der Botschafter in Beirut, der ebenfalls Gesandter in Irak war, wurde in diesem Land als Botschafter akkreditiert und die Gesandtschaft in Bagdad in den Rang einer Botschaft erhoben, als Botschafter wurde er auch in Jordanien und als Gesandter in Zypern, nachdem dieses Land seine Unabhängigkeit erlangt hatte, akkreditiert. Ferner wurde er zum Botschafter in der Syrischen Arabischen Republik ernannt, während in Damaskus eine Botschaft eröffnet wurde, die durch einen interimistischen Geschäftsträger geleitet wird. Die Gesandtschaften in Tunis und Caracas wurden in den Rang von Botschaften erhoben.

Das Generalkonsulat in Damaskus, das Konsulat in Dakar und das Vizekonsulat in Abidjon wurden anlässlich der Eröffnung von Botschaften in diesen Städten geschlossen. Nachdem Sierra Leone seine Unabhängigkeit erlangt hatte, wurde in Freetown ein Honorar General Konsulat eröffnet, der Sitz des Konsulates in Tanga (Tanganjika) wurde nach Dar-es-Salam verlegt.

[A.T.S.]

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