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RAVOIRE

Another pearl in the Valais' chaplet of beautiful sites

On the lookout for a quiet place not too high up, where Swiss-American friends would get a wide first glimpse of the Valais and its Alps, I myself discovered a beauty spot to be added to all I have found in this amazingly rich Canton.

Recently edited road maps still indicate as difficult some stretches of the Forclaz pass road and the one branching off it a few miles above Martigny leading to Ravoire. But this is no longer the case, for the Canton of Valais is continually improving its roads and highways. Our fifteen years old small car carried three passengers and their luggage up the steep slopes without the least difficulty.

Ravoire is not a typical village with dark wooden chalets and barns standing close together around a white church. It consists of a number of hamlets of old-fashioned Valais farm houses and new vacation chalets scattered for miles over small fields between forests.

Above one of these hamlets stands in a sunny site the new Hôtel de Ravoire which offers modern comfort, exquisite cuisine, a cozy lounge and a big "carnotzet" — restaurant-bar with old Valais furniture. Radio and TV are discreetly lodged in a far corner of this big room.

From the hotel, one overlooks the patchwork of fruit orchards and vegetable plantations in the Rhone Valley bedded between two ranges of high Alps. Through its middle the Rhone River traces a silver ribbon, while to the right railway and highway run for almost ten miles as straight as a ruler.

To the right of Ravoire, the view plunges into the narrow Val d'Entremont leading to the pass and tunnel of the Great St. Bernard, or into the Val de Bagnes, the Val Ferret, and to the Lake of Champex. All these valleys are deeply carved into the towering mountains of the southern range by streams rushing from glaciers toward the Rhone.

In mid-May, the meadows of Ravoire (3,600 ft. above sea level) were spattered with vividly coloured field flowers, and blooming apple trees displayed their pink and white bouquets above the grass and against the background of forests, while snow still lingered on summits some 1,500 ft. farther up. In spring, the Valais has two kinds of snow — that of frothy blossoms in the fruit orchards and that crowning the mountain tops.

The hamlets were so quiet that we asked where their inhabitants were staying. Early in the morning, some drive to Martigny to work in the town's industries, and the women and farmers who remained in Ravoire were working in the vineyards cascading over the steep slopes between the Forclaz road and Martigny.

We took walks in the vicinity, enjoying the pure air, the grand panorama and the great calm broken only by the song of numerous bird species. One day, we drove to the height of the Forclaz Pass to look down into the deep-cut valley of the Trient. Near the tavern, a chairlift goes up to the Monte-de-l'Arpille culminating at 6,500 ft. Up there, one has an exceptionally far-reaching view on the glaciers of the Mont-Blanc, the Valaisan, Bernese and Vaudois Alps and the region of Lake Geneva. Hikers then descend on easy paths on the northern slope toward the alpine pasture Arpille and reach Martigny in about three hours, or return to Ravoire.

Another advantage is that Martigny, the cross-roads of all the Valais' passes, is only fifteen minutes from Ravoire by car or postal bus. After visiting the town's venerable church, looking at the beautiful stained-glass window in the City Hall's stairway, or going to the lovely 18th century Manoir where interesting exhibitions are held each summer from June to October, there are innumerable possibilities of excursions in this splendid and diversified canton.

LEE EUGSTER.

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