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# THE BERNESE OBERLAND

The Bernese Oberland, which covers an area of 1800 square miles, comprises nine great valleys, the beautiful Lakes of Thun and Brienz and a number of small Alpine lakes as the Engstlen, Grimsel, Gelmer, Sägistal and Bachalp, Oeschinen and Blausee, which are conspicuous for their romantic setting. Among the numerous snow-clad peaks the most famous are those of the Finsteraarhorn (14,024 ft.), Schreckhorn, Jungfrau (13,661 ft.), Mönch, Eiger, and Wetterhorn, those of the Trift group, the Blümlisalp group, Wildstrubel and Wildhorn, each of which has its extensive glaciers.

In consequence of the extraordinary diversity of altitudes existing in this district, there are great contrasts of climate which necessarily show their effect in the vegetation of the respective regions. The fact that vine, figs, and other southern plants thrive on the sheltered shores of Lake Thun demonstrates the exceptional mildness of temperature prevailing here. Yet one can within three-and-a-half hours reach the region of eternal ice and snow on Jungfrau Joch. A visitor of Merligen or Spiez, for instance, can take a sunbath or a swim in the lake before breakfast and enjoy his lunch in the Berghaus (11,680 ft.) at the edge of the famous Aletsch Glacier, looking from his table upon the greatest glacier centre of Europe. From here he can walk or ski down to the Märjelen Lake, which

he can reach before nightfall. Thus he journeys in one day from the sunny shores of Lake Thun to a glacier lake, whose swimming blocks of ice remind the traveller of the Antarctic. A good sportsman may even row at Iseltwald in the early morning and ski down the Jungfrau névé in the afternoon, where in mid-July an annual ski meeting regularly attracts hundreds of skiers and spectators.

Even the two Lakes of Brienz and Thun differ very much from each other. Lake Brienz, which is 8½ miles long, 1½ miles wide and 870 ft. deep, is enclosed by steep mountain ranges, whose rocky structure and dark forests lend it a somewhat austere aspect and grandeur. Apart from a few places the shores are mostly inaccessible. Sombre cliffs rise from the dark green waters, and turbulent mountain torrents descending from precipitous

heights, plunge into the lake in thundering waterfalls. Where nature has created a few slightly advancing promontories, picturesque little villages have arisen, now the favourite haunt of painters and woodcarvers, of poets and people of a contemplative disposition.

Lake Thun, on the other hand, has quite another setting. Its length is 13 miles, the width being nearly 2 miles between Merligen and Faulensee and the greatest depth 700 feet. The shores of this lake are fertile and covered

with flowers and orchards, in which idyllic villages nestle. Laurel and chestnut, fig and vine add to the brighter hues, and the soft contours of the sunny bays, which are studded with mediaeval castles and modern manors, are steeped in light-blue waters.

There is a breath of ancient poetry about such a place as Spiez, for instance. The legend runs, that King Rudolph II of the Burgundians, on quitting his Strättligen residence near Einigen, built the present Castle of Spiez on the border of the lake and called it "The Golden Court". While the country round about was known as "The Golden Air", the neighbourhood of Einigen was named "Paradise". We may the more readily believe this poetical conception of the former landowners, as Heinrich von Strättligen has been immortalised by name, picture, and song in the list of the troubadours of the historic Manesse Manuscript.

In the 13th century the Castle of Spiez was in possession of the barons of Strättligen. When they were reduced to poverty, this beautiful property was taken possession of by the martial Bernese barons of Bubenbergh who were related to the house of Strättligen. Later it was transferred to the Erlach family, in whose hands it remained until Spiez became a health resort.

Another interesting spot on this lake is Oberhofen, where the old chateau Klösterli, the ruins of Balm Castle, the "Schlössli" and above all the beautiful Castle, built by the barons of Oberhofen in the Middle Ages, fascinate the leisurely wanderer. The oldest part of the castle is the massive tower with its fine rooms, one of which is decorated with wood-carvings and tarsias of the 16th century. Ancient and modern stained-glass windows de-



*The Castle of Thoun / Schloss Thun*



pict the family history of the former owners. This well preserved building is a perfect specimen of a castle of the Middle Ages. Among its different owners were the counts of Kyburg, who also possessed Thun Castle, and especially the nobles of Scharnachtal, one of whom was a leading commander in the battle of Morat, in which Swiss independence and liberty were successfully defended against the Burgundian duke Charles the Bold. A recent proprietor, count Pourtalès, renovated the Castle, which is now in the possession of Mr. W. M. Measey, the Philadelphia attorney and art-lover.

Thun, which has given the lake its name, was once the ancient Celtic fortification of "Dunum". The barons of Thun (one of whom was Bishop of Basle in 1215—1238, while another was Abbot of Einsiedeln in 1213—1233), were defeated in battle by duke Berchtold V of Zähringen, who built the imposing Castle of Thun, the fine characteristic tower of which is still standing. On the death of Berchtold, in 1218, the "Zähringer Schloss" came into the hands of the nephews, the counts of Kyburg, whose descendants lived through tragic scenes in this stronghold. In 1375 they sold it to the city of Berne. Like Berne, the town of Thun still retains traces of quaint mediaeval architecture, as in the town-hall, the

arcades, the Hauptgasse, the flights of covered stairs leading to the Castle or the drive from Lauitor to the Church.

The view of the Bernese Alps which one enjoys from the Church Terrace is one of the finest to be found in any Swiss town. Near by, half-way between Thun and Spiez you see Einigen, with its excellent ninehole Golf Course, owned by the Lake Thun Country Club. The churches of Einigen and Hilterfingen are very ancient and worth visiting. At Thun, Hilterfingen, Spiez and Unterseen, excavations have led to the discovery of prehistoric, Celtic and Roman remains.

Between the Lakes of Thun and Brienz is situated Interlaken, on the plain known as the "Bödeli", at the entrance of the Lütschine Valley. Interlaken is so well known that only a little comment is necessary. An elegant international resort, it possesses wonderful scenery and a good climate, from early spring, when its orchards are in blossom, to late autumn. United to these advantages

are the refinement of modern hotels and of a luxurious Kursaal. Here symphony and vocal concerts, operettas, grand balls, fireworks and other displays offer entertainment to those who do not wish to dispense with social life in the mountains. On the other hand horse races, passenger flights at the aerodrome, tennis, lake bathing, rowing and fishing, as well as innumerable excursions and climbs stimulate the out-door life of the visitors.

By crossing the various mountain passes, a good walker will see a great deal, probably the finest scenery of the Oberland. Arriving in this district via the Brünig Pass on foot or by rail, we descend amidst fragrant pine woods and reach Meiringen, the capital of the Hasli district, which is an important mountaineering centre. Here wanderers will arrive from Engelberg via the Joch Pass (and Engstlen Lake),

whilst others will come over from Wassen on the Gotthard line via the Susten Pass (with Susten Glacier), or from the Furka via the Grimsel route (with Grimsel Lakes and Handegg Falls). Having seen the church excavations, the Hasli Museum and the Aare Gorge, we pass the Reichenbach Falls and Rosenlauri and reach the Great Scheidegg, from which we descend into the picturesque Grindelwald

Valley, one of the

chief climbing centres of Europe. From here we walk or ride to the Little Scheidegg, the starting point of the Jungfrau Railway. A visit to the Eiger Glacier and the Jungfrau Joch is indispensable, the view from the Joch being a great, unforgettable experience. Leaving the Little Scheidegg, we descend by the Wengernalp line to Lauterbrunnen, which is known for its wonderful waterfalls, such as the Staubbach, Trümmelbach and Schmadribach, its glaciers and peaks. By funiculars and tram we reach the well-known Alpine resort of Mürren and the Allmendhubel, whence the Sefinenfurgge is reached, which leads to Griesalp in the upper Kien Valley. Via Bundalp we get to Hohtürli, where the Club hut for the Blümlisalp climbers is situated, and we descend to Kandersteg, passing the romantic Oeschinen Lake. From this important station of the Loetschberg line many a tourist will go via Petersgrat to Lauterbrunnen or via Gemmi to Leukerbad in the Rhone Valley. We choose



*Oberhofen*

the Bonderkrinde and reach Adelboden, whence we cross the much-favoured Hahnenmoos to Lenk, which is connected with Zweisimmen-Spiez by electric railway. While some will wish to traverse the long Rawyl Pass (with Iffigen Lake and Falls) leading to Montana-Sierre in the Valais, we climb our last Oberland pass, the Trüttlisberg, and reach Lauenen and Gstaad, the much discussed sport centre. From here the Montreux-Oberland Railway carries us back via Saanenmöser-Zweisimmen to Thun or to Interlaken and the Brünig.

Among the caves, gorges and waterfalls of the Oberland should be mentioned the Beatus Caves near Interlaken and the Schafloch ice-grotto above Gunten-Merligen. The Chief gorges are the Aare, Weissbach, Lütschine and Gunten gorges, whilst the waterfalls are almost innumerable. Above all others, figure the great Giessbach which precipitates itself from a dozen «step-

pingstones» over a height of 3200 feet into Lake Brienz, and the wonderful Trümmelbach with its mysterious gorge and glacier waters. Besides those mentioned, we may recall the Reichenbach Falls at Meiringen, the Dünden and Pochten Falls at Griesalp, the Berglibach and Kanderklus near Kandersteg, the poetical and famous Staubbach and the Handeck Falls, not to forget the magnificent Engstligen Falls above Adelboden.

Very appreciable are railway or walking tours to the Schynige Platte, the Harder, Heimwehfluh, Beatenberg and the Niesen Peak, a motor tour to Gurnigel Springs or Goldiwil, on account of the magnificent views you enjoy from these heights.

There can be no doubt that the rich variety of climate, scenery and means of travel in the Bernese Oberland are unsurpassed even in the rest of Switzerland.

*Dr. Charles Urech.*

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