

Flying fortresses

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of them doing good business despite the general down-trend in the Swiss tourist industry.

Much of the success is due to the hoteliers of Zermatt themselves. They have invested millions in renovation over recent years and are now reaping the reward. Hotels in Zermatt had a 70% occupancy last year, compared with 42% nationwide.

The Valais has produced its fair share of hotel pioneers (the legendary César Ritz came from this canton) and the family Seiler of Zermatt were the most famous hotel family of them all. They were largely responsible for putting Zermatt on the tourist map by opening the first real hotel there in 1853 - a tiny tavern, the Monte Rosa. Years later, Edward Whymper wrote that "if anyone enquired: What is the best hotel in Zermatt? - the answer was "Go to the Monte Rosa" or "Go to the Seilers". The Monte Rosa is now an elegant first class property with 90 beds, but still romantically reminiscent of the golden age of Alpinism.

Like Saas-Fee, Zermatt (resident population 5000) is also a car-free resort where many guests return year after year. Nearly 6000 of the resort's "regulars" have been going to Zermatt for at least 20 years.

To cope with the increasing international interest in Zermatt as a holiday destination, the Tourist Office has installed a computerised information system. The office used to receive up to 1000 telephone enquiries a day and many callers just could not get through.

Many enquiries are related to the Matterhorn, while some written requests from abroad are simply addressed to the "Matterhorn Village". And when

guests leave Zermatt it is nothing unusual for them to pen their praises in the style chosen by one couple staying at the Hotel Monte Rosa: "Thank you, Matterhorn, for shining in all your beauty and splendour all weekend. God's creation certainly is amazing".

OUR EDITORIALS

The last few Editorials in the Helvetia have received quite a few comments. Most of the readers who passed their comments to your Editor could see both the humour and the seriousness of the matters at stake. This is very heartening, because this is exactly what your Editor tried to achieve.

The Editorial on the super-rich (November Helvetia) reminded one of our readers, Bert Flühler, of some inscriptions he had seen on a walkway on the Bürgenstock. One of the inscription along the way said:

Unsere Erde hat nicht zuviele Menschen.

Sie hat nur zuviele Plünderer.

Your Editor is sure that these simple words sum up very aptly the thoughts of many of you.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

With this letter I would like to express how much I enjoy reading the Editorial in the "Helvetia". I always read it with great pleasure and find it interesting, informative and I like the sense of humour. Thank you very much, Henry Sigerist, for your well written contributions.

A. Wolf

FLYING FORTRESSES

On October 1945, just over 50 years ago, the last of the American Flying Fortresses left the airport of Dübendorf to fly back to the UK. Between 1943 and 1945, over 90 Flying Fortresses landed at Dübendorf, some of them in perfect condition, others badly damaged.

In line with Switzerland's strict neutrality, the Federal Council did not allow any aircraft to be moved until the end of the war with Japan in August 1945. Only then did the Swiss Government allow US aircraft mechanics and engineers to be brought to Dübendorf to perform the necessary maintenance on the aircraft to make them airworthy again. A particular twist to the story is that none of these 90 Flying Fortresses ever saw the USA again. They were flown to some USA air bases in the UK where they were eventually turned into scrap metal because, by then, the USA had no use for them anymore.

CARS BACK IN APPENZELL

Whilst more and more cities are creating car free zones, the town of Appenzell has gone against the general trend. For two years, cars had been banned from the centre of Appenzell, but now this ban has been lifted.

Two main reasons were at the root of the reversal:

1) The shops and businesses in the inner township had lost an enormous amount of their trade since the ban had been imposed.

2) The people living along the bypass roads complained that the increased traffic had drastically reduced their quality of life.

So, to restore business in the inner township of Appenzell and to allow "suburbians" to sleep at night and enjoy a peaceful daylight life again, the traffic is squeezed once more through the narrow streets of Appenzell and everyone lived happily ever after.