

# Switzerland 1902 - it really was a different country! : A follow-up to the article in Swiss express about taxing a vehicle

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tunnel. A little beyond the derelict Hotel Bahnhof, cross over the road by a crossing and take the path down to Göschenen station. Light refreshments are available from the station buffets at Andermatt and Göschenen. If you venture beyond the station into Göschenen village itself, the Hotel zum weissen Rössli will serve you anything from a coffee to full meals. At a leisurely pace the walk should take about 2½ hours, and you will certainly see more of this attractive gorge than is possible from the train. 



OPPOSITE: An Andermatt bound train passing the Devil's Bridge on 05.06.16.

Photo: David Carpenter

ABOVE: MGB Motor luggage van no. 95 leads a Göschenen train past Häderlisbrücke (just visible centre left). 05.06.16.

Photo: David Carpenter

LEFT: The Devil's Bridge.

Photo: Elizabeth Carpenter

RIGHT: Suworow Monument.

Photo: Elizabeth Carpenter



## Switzerland 1902 – It really was a different country!

### A follow-up to the article in *Swiss Express* about taxing a vehicle

Whilst doing some historical research in the records of the SBB/CFF SRS Member Adrian Friend came across a proposal (not proceeded with) made in 1902 to make automobiles, which were only just starting to appear in Switzerland, subject to the same laws on responsibility for accidents as railway companies. Adrian discovered a report (forwarded to *Swiss Express*) was produced on this proposal that gave statistics on the number of motor vehicles in Switzerland at that time, and the manner in which the cantons were proposing to deal with issues associated with them. It took until 1905 before the common registration system discussed in the March *Swiss Express* was adopted.

The 1902 report produced for the Federal Assembly is inconclusive as it notes that it had not received information from all the cantons, as some of them did not exercise control over motor vehicles, whilst others did not differentiate between the different types. The numbers listed by canton show a total of 457 cars and 99 motor powered cycles. For comparison when vehicle registration started in the UK in 1903 there were some 24,000 vehicles. It is forgotten that Switzerland was a poor country at the start of the 20th century. Genève with 185 cars, 26 'quadricycles' and 28 motorcycles had the most – almost 50% of the published total. Vaud followed with 97 motor vehicles; Bern with 41 cars and 23 'velocipedes'; Basel Stadt with 51 motor vehicles, Zürich with 38 cars and 7 'velocipedes'; Aargau with 27 cars and 15 motorcycles and

Neuchâtel with 20 motor vehicles. The cantons of Uri, Schwyz, Glarus, Appenzell, Graubünden and Valais reported that they had no motor vehicles. This probably reflected the local policies then in force in a number of cantons, that prohibited the movement of automobiles either absolutely, or at least on some mountain roads. The report notes that the vehicles listed are solely for the private transport of people. Some information was supplied that indicated that in the country there were 14 vehicles in use to transport private goods, 3 employed in commercial haulage and 4 used for the carriage of fare-paying passengers. Due to the lack of responses (or knowledge) coming from the cantons it is probable that these figures do not reflect the true number of vehicles in Switzerland. It is difficult to imagine that the unlisted cantons did not have any motor vehicles. It is interesting to note that Genève and Vaud, the cantons with the strongest cultural connections to neighbouring France, a country in a national love affair with the car by 1902, had the most motor vehicles. It is probable that the low numbers and slow spread of motor vehicles in Switzerland in 1902 helped account for the on-going development during this decade of tramways (and railways) into some of the more remote rural areas of the country. When motorised transport became more commonplace some of these schemes were to prove hopelessly uneconomic within just a few years. In 2016 Switzerland had 6m registered motor vehicles, 75% private cars. 