

High altitude dishonesty

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NOTE TO SECRETARIES

Next issue of the Helvetia magazine: **SEPTEMBER 1995**. All contributions must be in by 15 August. Many thanks for your kind cooperation.

HIGH ALTITUDE DISHONESTY

Modern life thuggery and vandalism is climbing up the Alps. The Alpine Club who operates most of the Alpine huts is dismayed at the new trend of vandalism that is creeping up the mountain paths and into its Alpine huts. Mountaineering used to be a sport of gentlemen, a sport where people respected the amenities provided by the Alpine Club, where the huts and refuges were welcomed for a night or two, where every climber took pride in leaving the huts in good condition after use so that the next fellow climber could enjoy them too.

There was a fraternity amongst mountain climbers who also realised that a fully equipped and operational Alpine hut could mean the difference between life and death for some mountaineers in case of emergencies..

Sadly to say, these feelings seem to have gone. Vandalism has reached the Alpine peaks. Unattended huts have now become the target of louts and vandals who take pleasure in smashing in windows, ripping out toilets and sinks, breaking doors, dismantling solar panels and stealing anything inside the huts that can possibly be carried away including the telephones, the most important items in case of an emergency. They simply destroy everything for the pleasure of destroying.

Even in attended huts, the guardian in charge has difficulties in controlling the vandals. Often he is alone against a whole bunch of hooligans with help from the police hours away.

No longer is it possible to take a mountain trip with the safe knowledge that you will find a fully equipped refuge at the end of the day. More often than not, you will face a broken down hut with part of the roof missing, windows and doors smashed in and the inside of the hut totally stripped of every content. If you are unlucky to arrive at such a hut in the middle of a snow storm, it could well mean tragedy for you as the hut no longer offers you the shelter you had expected to find. And with the telephone

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ripped out or smashed to bits, you cannot even call for help.

The worst is of course that on the whole, the vandals remain unpunished. The police is powerless. They have not the necessary resources to patrol the mountains to keep an eye on every mountain hut. For this they would need many helicopters and even if this were possible, they could not possibly inspect every hut every day. Given the weather conditions in the Alps, helicopter flights are not possible on a daily basis.

The Alpine Club can only appeal to the honesty of its members and hope that some sanity will return into people's minds.

THIS IS YOUR TRAIN DRIVER SPEAKING

The all too familiar announcement "This is your captain speaking" which you can hear on practically every flight, has now also been taken over by the SBB/CFF.

A trial run is in progress on certain trains where loudspeakers have been installed in the passenger coaches together with a microphone for the train driver to give a running commentary on the progress of the journey, to advise the name of the next stop (a job which

the now defunct ticket controllers used to do), the duration of the stop plus any particular information about possible delays en route.

The first reaction from the passengers was non-committal. Many commuters thought that they did not need all this information and would have preferred to be left alone. Others felt uneasy about the train driver giving too much attention to his speech rather than to the signals ahead.

Although the human voice over the loudspeaker gave the passengers at least the assurance that someone was still there up front driving the train, most passengers would have preferred the return of the good old ticket controller who used to walk through the train and gave people the feeling of a personal contact with the railway company.

With the present hooliganism and vandalism that seems to flourish in most countries, passengers on trains, in the absence of any uniformed official, feel insecure and vulnerable. The soothing voice of the train driver is no help at all to them if they in return cannot get in touch with him in case of some disturbance or mugging inside the carriage.



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