

To Switzerland by car

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TO SWITZERLAND BY CAR.

(For those of our readers who contemplate a holiday by car, the article below, which appeared in the March number of "COUNTRY LIFE," and which we reproduce by courtesy of the Editor, may be of interest.

While carrying out tests of the new Healey car during a recent visit to the Continent, I obtained much information of value about road, hotel and general conditions. For those who feel that our present austere life is one from which to escape whenever possible, I can think of few tonics to equal a motoring tour in Switzerland.

To enjoy the country to the full, and to get to know the people who live there, a car is certainly the ideal means, but for those who prefer to reach Switzerland either by rail or air there are excellent hire-car services available, many of the cars in use being British.

While in Switzerland I covered practically the entire country, missing only that part that lies south of a line drawn from Martigny, along the Rhône valley, to the Furka Pass, and then east to Liechtenstein. Not only were long fast runs done on the good main roads, but secondary and minor roads also were tried. Our principal stopping-places were Zurich, Basle, Berne and Geneva, but from each of these centres extended excursions were made into the surrounding countryside. As a centre for touring during the spring or summer, my choice would be either Berne or Zurich. Of these, Berne is, I would say, the more typically Swiss, while Zurich can offer the advantages of being truly cosmopolitan. Both Basle and Geneva suffer, as motor-touring centres, from being tucked away in corners, so that much time would be wasted covering the same roads more than once. I found the roads in an excellent state of repair throughout the country, and the standard set by the sign-posting is one we might well copy at home.

Petrol is unrationed, and a very good grade of alcohol fuel is available everywhere at 3s. 9d. per gallon. The deficiencies of our own pool petrol are well known, though by now we are almost accustomed to the incessant pinking that accompanies any effort to use our car's performance to the maximum. The fuel

in France, which must contain a large admixture of kerosene, is even worse, so the pleasure to be got from driving again on a clean and efficient fuel can be imagined. The garages struck me as being exceptional. Every workshop I inspected was an example of what it should be: polished tools neatly stored, and the operatives in clean overalls. On more than one occasion I observed clients' cars coming in for repairs, and in no case were they permitted in the workshop until the car had been thoroughly washed.

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In many European countries to-day it is unwise to stray too far from the main roads, for a variety of reasons. In Switzerland I found that even on the most minor road one could be sure of finding petrol pumps and cheerful service, and, almost as important, welcoming hotels and food such as we have only dreamt of during the last seven years. On one occasion, a navigational error on the road between Basle and Berne entailed crossing the mountains by a timber haulage road. We had visions momentary but none the less unpleasant, of missing the large mid-day meal to which we had by now become accustomed; but a stop at a *gasthaus* in a tiny hamlet produced a meal worthy of the hungriest of men — which we were.

The only things for which coupons are required are soap and restaurant meals. Coupons for both are provided by the authorities at the frontier, and further supplies can always be obtained through one's hotel. There appear to be unlimited supplies of cigarettes and tobacco, and at prices much lower than those in force at home. Many people will probably find it better to stay at an hotel that caters only for bed and *petit déjeuner*, for then one feels freer to explore. The present currency restrictions need not prove a barrier to enjoyment. If, for example, a party of three shares all expenses, it should easily be possible to enjoy a minimum stay of a fortnight in Switzerland with a standard of luxury unknown in Britain to-day.

For those interested in motoring sport, there are several events due to be held in Switzerland this season. The principal events are: the Grand Prix at Berne in June, the Maloja hill-climb in July, the Montreux hill-climb in August and the Grand Prix at Zurich in September. All these events are listed in the International Calendar, and when I was in Berne I inspected and drove round the circuit, which is in splendid condition.

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An excellent service, little known to visitors, although of great use to them, is available on any telephone throughout Switzerland. By dialling eleven one obtains an accurate weather forecast, for any particular area, covering the next 24 hours. The value of this service when touring can be imagined. On one occasion when I utilised it we were having severe mist and fog in Zurich, but the magic number told me at what height the sun could be found; a moment's work with a map and we were on our way to Trübsee and there spent the day above the clouds, in brilliant sunshine.

It is, of course, wise to study the various road signs before motoring in any foreign country, but there are two in use in Switzerland which cause some confusion to British motorists. These are the signs before guarded and unguarded level crossings. The sign for the guarded crossing is a white triangular plate with a red border, containing a simple drawing of a gate.

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For the unguarded crossing the sign is of the same style and colouring, but contains a simple drawing of an engine. At crossings which are unguarded great care should be taken.

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The one real problem about visiting Switzerland is, that unless it is carefully planned in advance, the journey across France may entail a certain degree of discomfort and convenience. In view of the present shortage of good hotels on long stretches of main road, particularly in what were the main battle areas, it is essential to cross to France on a morning boat so that one may get out of the war-damaged areas before night. If one is travelling by the direct route from Calais to Basle, via Belfort and Mulhouse, suitable stopping-places will be found at St. Quentin and Châlon-sur-Saône. If the crossing to Dieppe has been used the most convenient halts will probably be in the Paris area and at Avallon. It should be noted that, at present, the Dieppe boat runs in accordance with the tides, as the harbour has not yet been fully dredged; so full enquiries should be made before booking a passage. At the end of March the S.S. *Forde* will restart the Dover-Calais car ferry, on which it will be permissible to travel with a full petrol tank. This service will arrive at Calais at 1 p.m. Personally I would advise against using the direct route through Belfort and Mulhouse. Although the shortest in mileage, it is neither the quickest nor the most pleasant, for the roads in the Vosges mountains and in the Mulhouse area slow one down considerably and make driving rather a task.

My personal preference would be to cross by the Dover-Calais route, and then travel comfortably to the Paris area for the night. Even better than staying in Paris is to stop for the night at one of the many good hotels to be found outside the city, for example, in the Fontainebleau area. Apart from the fact that prices will be more reasonable, the welcome and the standard of service will be found to approach more closely to those of pre-war France. With not too late a start next morning, and following route N6, (sometimes called the best-fed road in France), one can easily reach Avallon for lunch. From here there are two alternative routes: either by way of Besançon and Pontarlier, and so into Switzerland by the Neuchâtel road; or carrying on down N6 to Macon, and then by Bourg to Geneva.

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Should a night be spent in Paris one problem has to be considered if one's time-table is not to be disorganised completely. At the moment, owing to the electricity shortage, the current is cut off in certain districts each day, and it is essential to make sure that one's garage has other means of extricating cars than by an electric lift.

Finally, on disembarking at the French port, it is well to call immediately on the official responsible for the issue of petrol coupons, as very often his supplies are limited. Should you be one of the unfortunate ones compelled to start the journey with less than the full allocation of coupons, additional supplies can always be obtained from a local petrol office on your route. Full and up-to-date details of these offices can be had from either the R.A.C. or the A.A., and the chief petrol office in Paris will also be found very helpful.



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