

Miss Jemima's Journey, 1963

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MISS JEMIMA'S JOURNEY, 1963

Part Two in the story of this summer's centenary tour of Switzerland, written and illustrated by DEREK MEAKIN

As the sun went down over the lake of Geneva, an English schoolboy rapped hesitantly on the massive oak door of Chillon Castle and asked the duty policeman: "May I come in please?"

Inside the castle's great banqueting room, guests were just beginning one of Chillon's celebrated candlelight dinners — the traditional spread which Montreux likes to lay on for its most distinguished visitors.

Guests of honour were the 13 "Victorians" in their voluminous century-old costumes, who were passing through the Swiss Riviera during their re-enactment of the first-ever conducted tour of Switzerland.

Into this gay scene walked the boy who was to become the mascot of the tour — Nicholas Morrell, looking even younger than his 14 years, whose ancestors were on the original expedition of 1863.

On that day alone Nicholas had proved that the

present-day Morrells have lost none of the determination, enthusiasm and perseverance which great-great-great-Aunt Jemima and great-great-grandfather William displayed when they set out on their pioneering journey a hundred years before.

Nicholas showed his independence by travelling from York to Montreux alone. He had left his boarding school shortly after breakfast that morning, took the bus to the station, the train to London, the coach to the airport and the plane to Geneva. Then he went by rail to Lausanne, changed trains for Montreux and then, for the first time in more than 600 miles, just didn't know what to do next.

He said afterwards: "I hung around on the platform for a while, then remembered which hotel I had been told some of the party were staying at".

So he changed a pound note for Swiss francs, and took a taxi to the hotel — where they directed him to Chillon.

In the days to come Nicholas was to demonstrate how determined he was to make the most of this unique 1963 tour — and unique it certainly turned out to be.

It was a schoolboy dream come true, with all the excitement of a Grand Tour and none of the boredom. With an extremely tight schedule to keep to, the party was on the move all the time, so that it became a non-stop whirl of new adventures and new experiences.

For Nicholas the fun started on the train from Montreux to Sierre when he heard that the Swiss Army had been turned out to help clear the snow-blocked Gemmi Pass, which they were due to cross the following day. Unprecedented early summer snowfalls had made this over-the-mountains route from Leukerbad to Kandersteg impassable. Not only were the soldiers called in — a giant snowplough was hard at work, too, after being hoisted by aerial cableway from the valley station to the Gemmi, a difference in altitude of 2,700 feet.

But before they were due to start their journey across the Pass, the programme called for the party to spend the night at Leukerbad. Here Nicholas had his first sight of the famous mineral baths — and the unforgettable spectacle of what bathing there might have been like a hundred years ago.

Tent-like bathing costumes, looking more like colourful nightgowns than the kind of outfit respectable Victorian



Tourist chief up to his neck in hot water. Albert Kunz invites Miss Jemima to a game of chess at Leukerbad.



Mountain travelling the easy way. Thanks to the "Victorians", the quaint Gemmi-Wagen are now back in business

bathers would wear in public, had been specially tailored for the occasion. Members of the Miss Jemima party donned them with glee and plunged straight into the steaming hot baths, much to the consternation of the photographers who had gathered round the side waiting to record their antics. Even the tour officials, led by the Swiss National Tourist Office's London manager, Albert Kunz, couldn't resist the temptation to take the waters.

Perhaps it was just as well, because before the day was out they were to face the toughest part of the whole expedition.

For the crossing of the Gemmi, thoughtful village officials in Kandersteg had miraculously produced seven Gemmi-Wagen. I say miraculously because this ancient form of mountain transport — one-seater horse-drawn carriages constructed so that regardless of the gradient the passenger seat is always in a horizontal position — had long been in disuse.

An appeal had been put out for the loan of any that were still available. Only one of the seven that were found — owned by the Swiss Transport Museum in Lucerne — was in working order. The others, stored at farms in the region, had to be considerably repaired before they were able to be used.

But now the seven were ready, and the crinoline-encased ladies of the party, after scrambling over 20-foot-high snowdrifts to get to them, were able to cross the Pass in comparative comfort. The rest of the party followed as best they could, including a very spritely Nicholas Morrell who politely but firmly turned down all the offers to hitch a lift with the ladies.

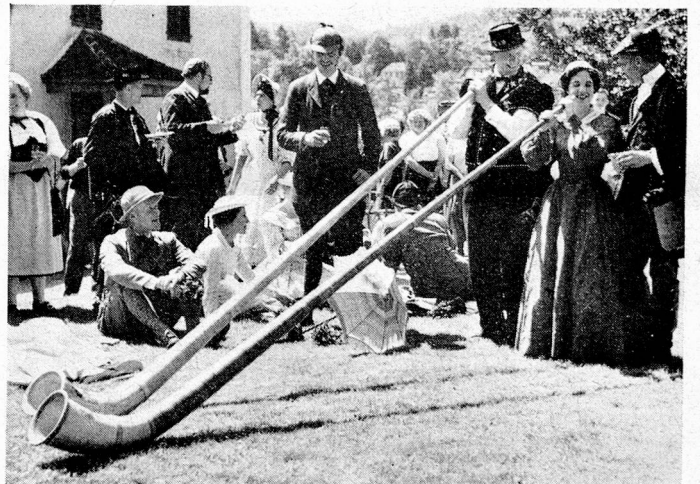
The re-creation of the Gemmi-Wagen cavalcade had an unexpected result. It caused so much interest in the world Press that the Kandersteg village council decided that the carriages should be brought back into permanent service.

Now this unusual form of mountain transport — first records of which go back to 1855, when the rough road was first cut from Kandersteg to the Gemmi — is available to all.

NEXT — What happened the day the sun failed to rise!



Handshake from a Swiss friend starts Nicholas Morrell on his trip across the Gemmi. But in the end, he preferred to walk — just like his great-great-great Aunt Jemima!



Alphorn practice in the grounds of Spiez Castle. Janet Edwards, the 1963 Jemima, gets blow-by-blow encouragement from Dr. Hans Dasen, dressed as an 1863 huntsman.