

# A stormy night on the Julier Pass

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### A STORMY NIGHT ON THE JULIER PASS

The snow storms of the Engadine have never been regarded as remarkable for their mildness; but on the night of 16th December 1885 there occurred one, whose severity travellers over the Julier Pass are not likely soon to forget. We started from Chur, a party of three men and two ladies, with every reason to expect a fine day. However, as we gained the higher and more exposed parts a strong wind sprang up from the south, accompanied by violent storms of rain and sleet. Mühlen was at length reached in time for luncheon. This meal after a long fast since day-break was attacked by all with a courage which no thoughts of indigestion could stay. With lightened hearts and pockets we then set out on the remainder of the journey in covered sleighs instead of the more appropriate open ones. These latter might possibly have accomplished the journey safely, but the former as it happened, proved the great cause of our subsequent misfortunes. The top of the Pass was reached with great difficulty about 4.30 p.m. and during a rest of five minutes sundry refreshments were partaken of as a provision against present and future cold.

It must be explained that in winter after a heavy storm, the track over the pass is only wide enough for one horse to find a footing, as the snow at the side is quite soft and very deep. On starting from the Hospice the "post" consisted of a covered post sleigh which in size and appearance somewhat resembles the body of an ordinary diligence on runners, drawn by four horses, and contained besides the driver and conductor the two ladies before mentioned. My two companions and myself followed in a covered sleigh drawn by two horses and known in this country as "Zweispänner" the four horsed sleigh soon outdistanced us, and in the fast approaching dusk and the driving snow were soon lost to sight. We had thought the road up to the Hospice bad enough, but on the level part at the top of the pass it was frightful; the snow on the track was some two feet deep and was falling like a thick mantle on all around; the wind was blowing a hurricane in our teeth. At every few steps one or other of the horses got off the track into the deep snow at the side, and there, plunged about up to their shoulders, the sleigh jolting and swaying most uncomfortably; every moment we expected to capsize in some deep drift invitingly near the track. After we had struggled on for about a mile from the Hospice our sleigh became embedded in a small avalanche which had only just fallen across the track, had we been but five minutes earlier we should probably have been buried beneath many tons of snow. The horses were by this time "dead beat". We all three struggled with our small stock of German to discuss the situation with the driver, but without success, however, by gesticulatory remarks he made us understand that it was best for us to proceed on foot, while he repaired, to the Hospice with the horses (happy horses!).

We left our rugs and wraps to the tender mercies of the storm, and set out to trudge the four or five miles down the pass to Silvaplana. At first we thought it rather amusing, and not at all a bad commencement of Christmas festivities to walk over an Alpine Pass in a midwinter snow storm. We had not gone more than a few hundred yards before we changed our minds, and began to think that plunging at every step into two feet of snow and occa-

sionally up to our arms, nearly blinded by the wind, was monotonous. Things began to look serious, the track in many places could hardly be discerned, and the landmarks being obliterated by the driving snow, the telegraph posts were our only guide, and as these often take short cuts down a ravine we did not rely very cheerfully on their guidance. However, before we had gone about a mile we saw looming through the darkness the other post sleigh, this in its turn had become snowed up, and the horses thoroughly exhausted.

The occupants before mentioned were, an elderly English lady on her way to the Maloja, and an Engadine lady. Under the circumstances we did not wait for a formal introduction, but immediately convened a conference on the situation, the Engadine lady fortunately speaking English, and enabling us to discuss matters with the driver. There were three courses open to us, none particularly inviting, either to spend the night in the sleigh with our clothes wet through with the melted snow and without wraps, or to walk up the pass to the Hospice, about two miles, or proceed on foot down the Pass to Silvaplana. On the advice of the driver we chose the last course, and started.

The cavalcade consisted of the driver and conductor and the four horses, they led the way, my friends and I followed assisting as best we could the two ladies, who showed great pluck under the trying circumstances. We plunged on through the snow always up to our knees and often beyond our waists, the wind was still howling, and the snow drifting in our faces so that we could see no more than five or six yards in front, having to call out frequently for fear of missing each other, only one of our party had any spirits, and that but a little whisky in a flask, some of this we gave to the driver and divided the rest with as much care as a shipwrecked mariner watches the diminution of his small supply of water. Before we had gone very far the English lady fainted and was only revived by a little whisky; this occurred three times, on each occasion she seemed to get weaker and weaker and the more help we had to give her, till at last we almost carried her between us. Notwithstanding, she showed unflagging spirit and courage. After walking on for some distance we all got very exhausted and began to lose hope of ever getting to our destination. After about an hour-and-a-half drudging down the pass, we came to an abandoned, empty luggage sleigh, to this we attached one of the horses and upon it sat the exhausted ladies, we men trudging on as best we could and after two more hours of struggling through the snow we caught sight of the welcome lights of the relief party that had been sent to our rescue from Silvaplana.

From this point the remaining three miles to that place were passed with an occasional upset but otherwise without mishap. At Silvaplana a change of garments was obtained and we journeyed thence in comparative comfort to St. Moritz. We arrived there about five hours late while the mails were not delivered till the middle of the next day. Such an occurrence has not happened for many years; we are sincere in the hope that no future visitors may experience an equally unpleasant adventure.

*St. Moritz Courier*".