

Zermatt in summer

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but, according to the N.Z.Z., this doesn't prevent local hoteliers from ignoring the law and openly bringing guests in their cars to their hotels.

The citizens of Zermatt are also deeply divided as to whether the road to the town should be enlarged. Credits for these works have already been voted. There is a growing hostility among the local population towards apartment dwellers, many of whom are foreigners, because it is felt that the exorbitant cost of land in Zermatt, which locals can no longer afford, is due to the developers and speculators who built these apartments.

Before leaving Switzerland, I spent a few days in the Monte Rosa region, climbing three of the highest peaks of the group. These climbs started from the Gnifetti hut, in Italy, to the south of the Monte Rosa massif. It is situated at an altitude of 3,650 metres and can be reached from the

resort of Alagna, at 1,200 metres. One must take the cable lift to the Punta Indren, 3,250 metres above sea level, and then cross on foot a glacier and some rocks for about one-and-a-half hours before reaching the hut. It could almost be described as a hotel. It has room for 260 climbers although, during the week, there are normally no more than thirty or forty climbers there. The food served is almost as good as in a hotel, which is definitely a good point when climbing at these altitudes.

Leaving the hut at 4 a.m. my guide and I first set foot on the lofty peak of Zumsteinspitze (4,563 metres), and then, through a traverse over a ridge, we reached the Signalkuppe (4,554 metres). On top of this peak is attached, by means of heavy chains, the world's highest observatory and hut, the Cabana Margherita. The view from this point in all directions

is immense and unforgettable. It is possible to spend the night up there as there is sleeping accommodation for about a dozen people. But it is rather rough. I spent a night there fifteen years ago. An unforgettable experience, but one which I would not like to repeat. At such an altitude, the nightmares take over and it is quite impossible to sleep well even for a minute.

I would have liked to set foot once more on the Dufourspitze (4,634 metres), the highest mountain in Switzerland, which I have already climbed five times. However, the rocky ridge leading to it was impassable owing to enormous masses of snow covering it. Instead, we finished our climb by scaling the nearby Parrotspitze, 4,436 metres high. We got back to the Gnifetti hut after midday and I was none the worse for the effort for all my 69 years of age.



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