

A drive across three passes

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have, moreover, come to an agreement to the effect that in view of the devaluation of the dollar they will not increase their prices in 1974.

All this seems to show that the Zürich Hotel Proprietors consider a big Publicity – or Public Relations Operation as necessary. It is a fact that some 3 or 4 years ago it was sometimes extremely difficult to find suitable hotel accommodation in or very near Zürich and booking well in advance was indispensable. Occasionally people without advance bookings had to be sent as far as Stäfa or even Rapperswil. But today things are different and competition in the international tourist-accommodation market makes itself felt. Nor is this all. The Association of “Kur- und Verkehrsdirektoren” – in other words those in charge of local tourist interests all over the country – have just held their general meeting in the course of which a resolution, addressed to the competent authorities, has been unanimously adopted. In this resolution they express their grave concern about the constant reduction of the number of those who are admitted as “saisonniers” in the hotel trade. This, they argue, is bound to lead to a deterioration in the quality in the whole hotel and catering trade, which in turn is doing damage to the image of Switzerland as a tourist country, both internally and abroad.

On a different level it should be put on record that the first 108 refugees from Chile – a total of 200 is to be admitted according to a decision of the Federal Council – have now arrived in Switzerland. 23 of them are citizens of Chile, some 30 are Brazilians and the remainder are citizens of Uruguay, the Argentine and Haiti. They are in the care of the Swiss Red Cross and have, for the first 2 months, been taken to welfare centres in Pully and Glion, as well as Altstätten near St. Gallen. The aim is to get them acclimatised first and afterwards

to find work and suitable homes for them with a view to integrate them totally into the Swiss way of life.

Finally it may interest a number of readers to know that the Swiss Cavalry does not now exist any more. A last report and farewell ceremony has taken place in the historic little town of Avenches (Aventicum) some days ago, in

the presence of some 50,000 spectators, among them high officers, politicians and other well known personalities. The absence, however, of the Chief of the Federal Military Department, Federal Councillor Gnägi, was very much noted and commented upon. As one of the Zürich papers commented: “Since this son of a peasant has had to disband the cavalry regiments, he is not so popular any more”.

Gottfried Keller

A DRIVE ACROSS THREE PASSES

The St. Gotthard

The Gotthard, first of all, owes its importance to its commercial value, it is a first rate commercial road, whereas the Nufenen and the Furka are tourist roads. As to strategic importance, the St. Gotthard ranks first; it is the transalpine route of Central Switzerland to the Tessin and Italy.

Starting our journey from Hospental, situated between the confluent of the rivers Furkareuss and Gotthardreuss, the splendidly constructed road ascends the last slope of the St. Gotthard group amidst flowered pastures to the barren Vale of Gams, on the left of the Gotthardreuss, to the road windings of Mätteli, where one enjoys the superb view of the Urseren Valley and the Spitzberge range, to the snowy summit of the imposing Galenstock and the Furka, and on the glaciers of Pizzo Lucendro ahead of us.

Passing various small lakes and the barren summit of the Pass and busy traffic of the wonderful new highway that we experienced two years ago, we went straight on to the Hospice and the ancient and impressive Val Tremola, the

“Valley of Turmoil”, one of wildest and most interesting gorge of the Alps. The road has more than 40 bends before rejoining the new highway winding its way down to Airolo with a magnificent view of the Valle Leventina.

Airolo, 1175, with excellent hotels and restaurants, is a favourite holiday resort in summer. Airolo is at the southern entrance of the great railway tunnel, and to ease its heavy traffic, a second tunnel Göshenen – Airolo is today in course of construction (see map).

The Val Bedretto

That part of the higher valley of the river Tessin (Ticino) between Airolo and the Nufenenpass. The Val Bedretto is limited in the North by the powerful masses of gneiss and granite of the Gotthard Alps, and in the South by the Alps of Tessin – among the first ones, we distinguish above all the Pizzo Lucendro, 2,964 and the Pizzo Rotondo, 3,192; among the second ones, the Poncione di Vespero, 2,717; the Madone, 2,756; Pizzo Cristallina, 2,912, and at a distance, the Poncione di Braga, 2,864.

The slopes of this valley are in general very steep and in their lower parts furrowed by many torrents, slides and trails of avalanches. The Val Bedretto presents a severe and redoubtable character of the mountain that reveals itself even in summer by frequent landslips and ruptures of rocks. Yet one encounters beautiful Alpine scenery, meadows enamelled with flowers of bright colours, and beautiful larch and fir-tree forests lower down the valley.

Fontana, 1,200, 5 km from Airolo, is the first and only village on the right bank of the Tessin. Villa, 1,364, is a village which has much suffered from avalanches. In 1972, the church was carried away; it was reconstructed with the actual bell-tower much admired today; it is pentagonal, but the angle facing the mountain is prolonged and very pointed to break the avalanches. This danger has much diminished since protective works were made on the mountain slopes of Val Bedretto. An

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interesting footpath leads through the Canannapass, 2,611, to Realp.

Bedretto, 1,402, is the parish village of the valley. Dairy farming and the making of delicious fat-cheese. All'Acqua, 1,614, and Hospice nearby, is enlivened in summer with tourists and climbers of neighbouring passes and mountain summits.

The Nufenenpass

The Nufenen or Passo di Novena, 2,478. Cantons Tessin and Valais, the highest road pass of the Swiss Alps, is between the Nufenenstock and Pizzo Gallina, 3,061, in the mountain range separating the Upper Valais from Tessin and Italy, and connecting the Val Bedretto to the Eginenthal, and by those valleys Airolo to Ulrichen. From the Nufenen, where the Tessin has its source, one enjoys the superb view of the Aletsch and Gletscher groups, the Finsteraarhorn, Yungfrau, Mönch, Fiescherhörner, Eiger and Schreckhorn, a magnificent panorama.

This passage was very anciently known, as was its near neighbours the Griespass, 1,462, on the Italian border and where there is an extended view of the Italian Alps. Both passes were much in use as a thoroughfare between Berne and Italy before the opening of the Simplon in 1906.

The Eginenthal brings us to Ulrichen, 1,251, on the right bank of the Rhône. Ulrichen treasures the reputation of being the birthplace of Valais: independence as it was there, in the years 1211 and 1419, that the Duke of Zähringen and the Bernese were defeated.

Obergesteln, 1,369, our next village, was set on fire during the

battles of 1211 and 1419; partly buried by an avalanche on February 18th, 1720, and again entirely destroyed by fire in February 1868. Rebuilt in stone it offers a different character from neighbouring villages chiefly built of wood.

Oberwald, 1,370, is the last village of the Goms Valley; its church, with a protective buttress against avalanches, and a beautiful hotel were for many years the only edifices constructed entirely of stone. Apart from tourist catering, the main resource of the inhabitants, as in the whole Goms Valley, is cattle breeding and dairy farming. Goms cheeses are estimated for the «*raclette*», the fondue speciality of the Canton.

The Furkapass

We are now at Gletsch, 1,761. Alpine station and mountain pasture in summer, in the upper extremity of the Rhône Valley and the source of the great river at the foot of the glacier. This locality takes its name from the proximity of the glacier, the Rhone Gletscher, the only glacier of the Swiss Alps that can be approached so closely by motor-car. Gletsch is only 6 km to the Grimselpass where there is a grand view of the glacier from the first windings of the road.

The Furka, cantons Valais and Uri, surpasses all Alpine passes for the grandiose and variety of sites traversed. The road of the Furka, the road itself, is remarkable in point of view technical, it ascends fearlessly in a series of daring windings. From the top of the pass, 2,431, the view embraces the Rhône Glacier, the massiveness of the Finsteraarhorn. Simplon, Weissmies,

Mischabel, Weisshorn, and the Matterhorn. It is, without contradiction, the most beautiful panoramnic view from the Furka; and on the other side of the Urseren Valley and its mountains as far as the Oberalp pass. The Grimsel, Furka and Oberalp passes are connecting the Bernese Oberland with the Grisons through beautiful and transendant Alpine scenery.

There are two magnificent hotels open in summer on the Furka road; the 'Belvédère' near the top of the pass, and the 'Galenstock' about half way to the village of Realp, 1,544.

Realp

In 1733, Realp was destroyed by an avalanche. Today the village is protected against them by strong constructions and afforestation. In 1735, Capuchin friars founded an hospice in Realp to attend and succour travellers. Their mission was approved by Pope Clement XII in 1739. Goethe and the Duke of Weimar spent a night in this hospice at the end of the 18th century. The village church was reconstructed in 1881, and consecrated the same year by the Bishop of Chur, under the title 'The Invention of the Holy Cross'. Finally, Realp was raised to a parish in 1882; it is a thriving village from late spring to end autumn. Mountain guides, dairy farming and the making of Urseren cheese, a local speciality.

Realp is linked to the Göschenalp Valley and Göschenen by the Aelpligenlücke, and to the St. Gotthard Hospice through the Orsinopass, 2,600, by the Pizzo Orsino, and the Orsirora and Lucendro lakes. Both of those gorgeous footpaths are known and were enjoyed by the writer of these lines when in his teens . . . many years ago!

From Realp, the road slopes gently and almost in a straight line to Hospental along meadows of the Urseren Valley.

From Hospental to Airolo, the Nufenen, the Furka and back to Hospental, the distance is exactly 100 km (62½ m), allowing for a leisursly ride all the way along splendid Swiss scenery.

Pierre Savoie



Vinicultural Museum on the Lake of Bienne

The "Hof" at Ligerz, a 16th century old manor-house on the Lake of Bienne, has recently been renovated and transformed into a vinicultural museum. All sorts of vinicultural apparatus are already on show in the attic rooms. By next year, the cellar and other rooms on the lower floors will have been got ready for the exhibition. Visitors to the museum which also houses the "Information Centre for Wines of Lake of Bienne Region", discover the secrets of wine-making and get to taste some of its wines. For the time being, the museum is open each afternoon from 2 to 5 p.m. and at weekends from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Entry fee: 2 francs.

