

Routes that span the centuries

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The long winding road over, from a period print. And, below, an etching showing the old Devil's Bridge.



The longest road tunnel in the world, piercing the St Gotthard massif for about 10 miles, was opened on September 5. Here **Mariann Meier** looks at ways of taking the Gotthard route both ancient and modern . . .

Routes that span

THE Gotthard route was in use as long ago as Roman times, and in the Middle Ages it became possible at last to traverse the perilous Schoellenen Gorge.

The pass road, opened in 1830, was the only access from the North. When a nine mile long tunnel was made through the Gotthard massif, it was sensational. It took seven years and five months, and some 2,500 men laboured day and night in three shifts before it was completed. In all, 177 men lost their lives, among them the director of the project, Louis Favre.

On February 28, 1880, the two parties from north and south met, and on June 1, 1882, the regular train service was inaugurated.

The trip by mule track in the

13th century took days, and even the stage-coach required a whole day to get from Goeschenen to Airolo. Today the express train passes through the tunnel in 12 minutes.

Until recently the only way to get a car across was either to drive it over the summit (2108m) – a most rewarding and beautiful journey – or to have the vehicle conveyed by special trucks from Goeschenen to Airolo or vice-versa. About 400,000 motorists have crossed the Gotthard in this manner every year.

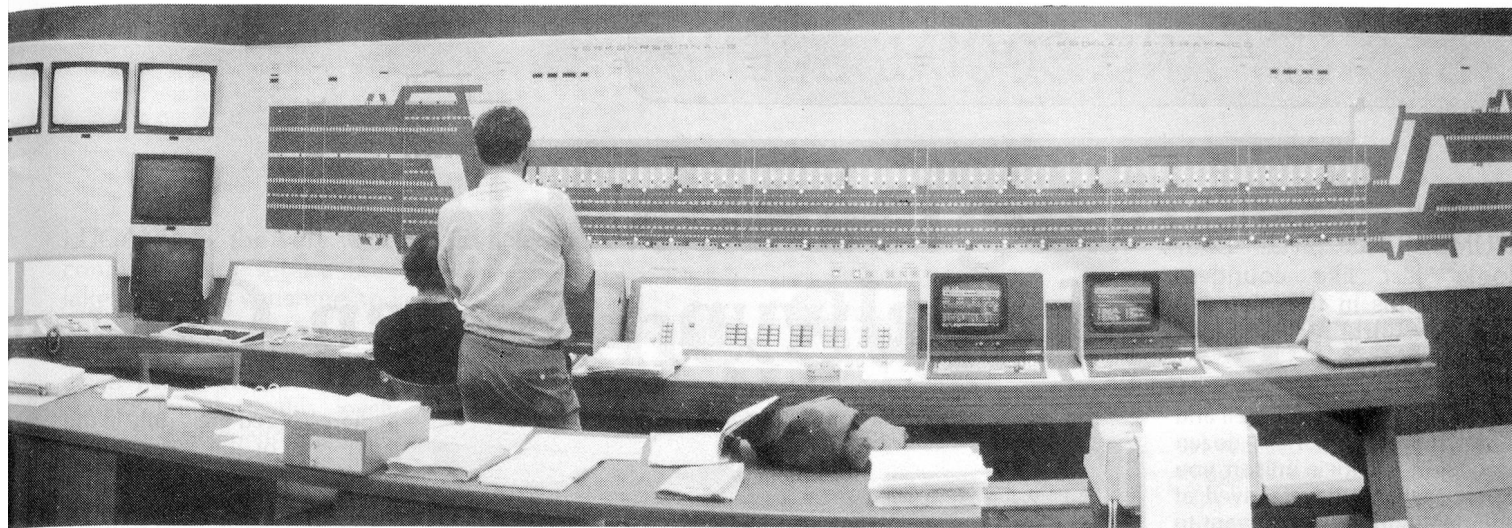
Now, after 11 years of work, the longest road tunnel in the world has been opened to traffic. It is 16,322km long – about 10 miles – and lies at 1,100m above sea level. To construct the tunnel, one million cubic yards of solid material had to be dug out.

The cost of the whole project amounted to Sfr. 686 million, Sfr. 380 million more than budgeted. Yet it is toll-free, and to pass through it from Uri to Ticino, even in winter, costs nothing beyond the petrol.

A book could be written on the difficulties facing the engineers. Let us mention just one, the frequent flooding, by as much as 200 litres a second.

The safety devices and most modern installations are a hallmark of this gigantic undertaking. Among them are seven electronically powered ventilation installations with a total of 18 fresh air ventilators, illumination throughout with a fire and emergency/SOS warning signalling system, and traffic surveillance carried out by a TV monitor and signalling system.

The famous Devil's Stone of legendary importance had to be



One of the control centres – they are positioned at each end of the tunnel – which regulates the traffic flow.

the centuries



Inside the Gotthard road tunnel . . . speedy, safe and free from tolls.

removed, shifted 130 metres at a cost of Sfr. 300,000. It is now to be found at the northern entrance of the tunnel.

When the Devil's Bridge across the Schoellenen was built in 1218 the people of Uri made a pact with the devil who promised to construct a bridge in three days provided he could have the first soul that went across.

The Uri people sent a goat across as a first being, and the devil was so furious that he took a huge boulder in order to destroy the bridge. But a woman had marked the stone with a cross, and the devil departed speedily.

The road tunnel was opened on September 5. The first vehicles to cross it were 28 postal motor coaches with 1,200 invited guests, followed by 100 veteran cars, and an army of private cars soon streamed through the tunnel in both directions.

Below the central ventilation control at roughly half-way through the tunnel, Federal Councillor Hürlimann opened the tunnel to traffic. The two

Roman Catholic Bishops of Chur and Lugano blessed the work, and the radio orchestra of "Radio della Svizzera Italiana" played Rossini's William Tell overture – incidentally with excellent tunnel acoustics. It was a moving ceremony, and many festivities followed.

The "Neue Zuercher Zeitung" carried a special supplement on the tunnel on August 26. It carried an appreciation by Federal Councillor Hürlimann, who called it a milestone in the construction of national roads.

On December 12 this year the Seelisberg tunnel on the left shore of the Lake of Lucerne, between Beckenried and Flüelen, will be opened. It is 9.25km long, and it will take another hour and more off the North-South route.

Thus there is progress everywhere. Already well in operation is the rail link with Zurich airport. After the airport was opened in 1949 it dealt with 175,000 passengers in the first full year. Since then, 100 million passengers have passed through the international airport, 8 million alone for the first time

last year.

After a quarter of a century when planning first started and nine years after construction began, the 1.7km of the motorway to bypass parts of Zurich is completed, and the northern part between Tierspital and Aubrugg is open to express traffic. Half of it is underground and the lighting installations are of the most modern. It is also the most expensive of all city motorways in Switzerland – it cost Sfr. 205 million.

But the experts say it was worth it, for 6,000 vehicles can pass every hour, and ecologists praise it as exemplary from their point of view.

To quite a different world one



On through the Reuss valley goes the winding pass road.