

Taking the bisse

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WALKING THE LINE



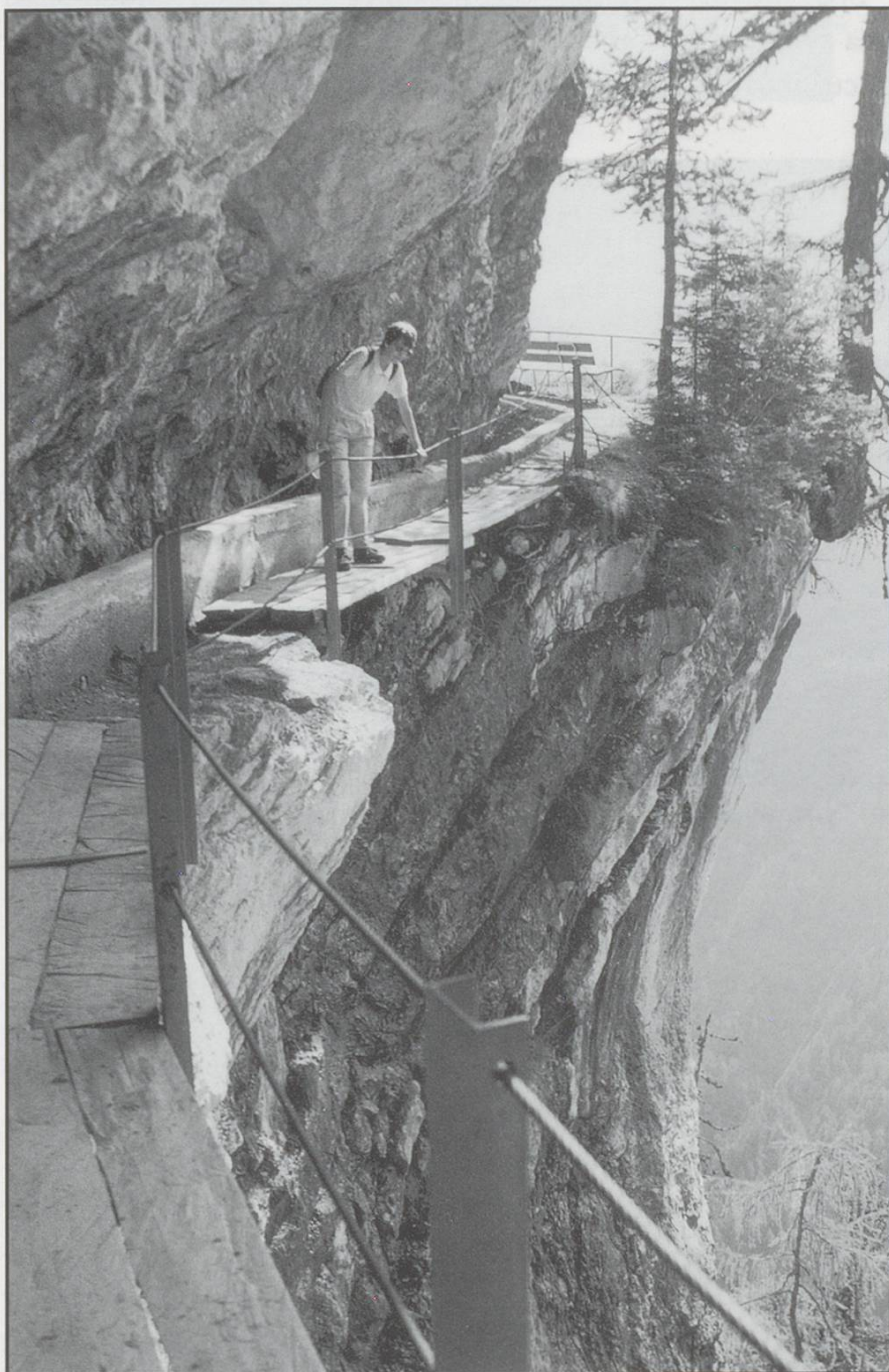
Continuing the occasional series of articles about walking in conjunction with the Swiss Travel System Pete Dyson and Lester Weeks offer some suggestions for getting the circulation going and for once getting you off the train.

Remember that these walks are suggestions and not detailed instructions. If you try any of them make sure you have a map, the proper equipment and that you are fit enough. The Champagne Air of Switzerland is rightly famous but like Champagne it can be heady and leave you breathless.

Pete Dyson

TAKING THE BISSE

A series of walks from their base in Crans-Montana provided Pete and his wife with some unparalleled walking in this popular part of Switzerland.



Looking over, literally, the Bisse du Ro. Photo: Pete Dyson

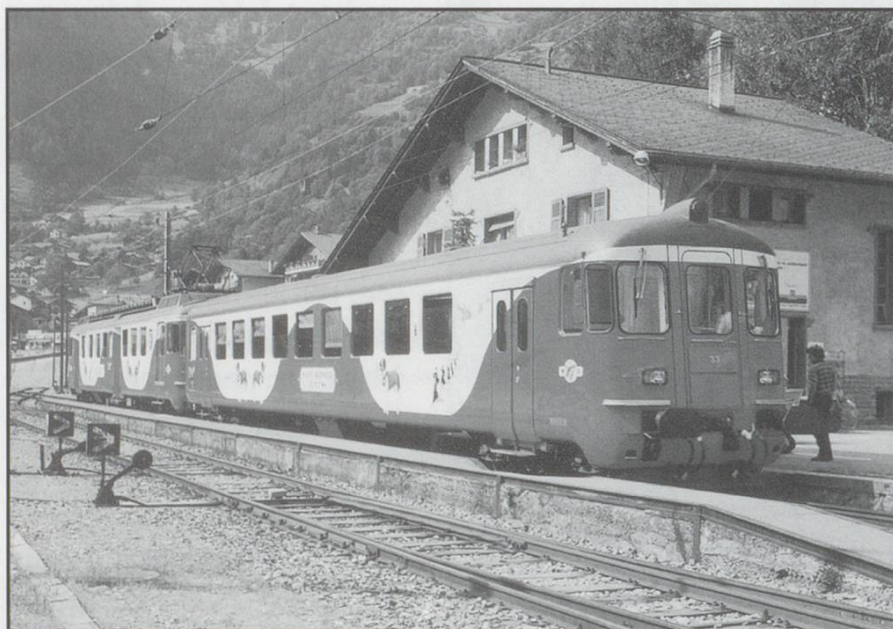
A "bisse" is an ancient aqueduct system that in olden times irrigated the vineyards, etc. and supplied water from the mountains to the peoples of the hamlets below. This area of Valais is renowned for them, and some are still active and some only in part. There were 21 listed in the Canton Valais Magazine, and what could be better than walking alongside one in this often hot district. With a couple of Co-ops it's another self-catering bonus. We stayed in an apartment about five minutes from the top of the 12 minute catapult funicular (non-stop) from Sierre (or via two differing bus routes) and on a clear day had a view south of the Rhône and about 80 snow clad peaks. We made full use of a Sion Pass.

THE BISSE DU RO

One of the scariest walks, and certainly not for vertigo sufferers, involves the Bisse du Ro. There are only two

buses a day to the Rawil Barrage (Dam Lac de Tseuzier) and, as it was a grim morning, we chose to take the afternoon service. From Crans this involves a change at Botyre. As the bus approaches the Dam one can see what looks like a hairline fracture along the side of the Chetseron opposite. This is the path of the Bisse du Ro.

Leaving the bus on one side of the Dam, cross to the other side and head for the Vallon de l'Ertenze in the direction of Bellalui. You're on the Wildstrubel Traverse Path. It is important to follow the signs marked "Bisse du Ro" as others marked "Crans-Montana" will steer you clear of this spectacular path cut into the



A Martigny Orsières unit at Le Châble waiting to leave for Sembrancher. Photo: Pete Dyson

cliff face - the Bisse is on the cliff side - and some hair-raising sections include wooden walkways secured by safety rails and fixed cables in sheer rock and one has to duck several times whilst holding on to life - underneath the planks may be a 300m drop! From the Dam one should reach the pastures at Er-de-Chermignon in 45 minutes from where the East path splits in two - one up to the "Cry-d'Er"-the other along the Bisse. After what seems eternity you eventually meet civilization again when you cross a road and pass an artifi-

cial lake, Etang Grenom, just above Montana. Congratulate yourself for surviving three hours.

THE BISSE DU MILIEU VIA THE TOP OF THE ALPS

We headed for Sion (worth investigating through its narrow lanes leading up to the Château de Tourbillon which dominates the town), before catching the bus to Super-Nendaz. It was a chairlift next up to Tortin, from where we changed to a cable car to the Col-des-Gentianes. This straddles two valleys - Verbier on the other side has a jumbo sized cablecar to it. The last cablecar section takes one up to Mont Fort at 3328m with quite the

best all round view of the Alps we have had in the country, with Mont Blanc on one side and Matterhorn on the other - almost touchable. We retraced our steps to Super-Nendaz from where we walked back alongside the active Bisse du Milieu from Planchouet into Nendaz, about two hours walk. From Planchouet we could have "bissed" to Veysonnaz as the aqueduct connects Nendaz and Veysonnaz. One had to pay for water in those days - what's different?!

ALPINES AND ALPS

Another trip involved a change at Sion onto a local train for Riddes, where we picked up a very minibus to Mayens-de-Riddes high up the valley, transferring to gondolabahn up to Savoleyres, midst alpine flowers on a ridge with Mont Fort on one side, Mont Blanc on the other and Verbier below. We spent two hours wandering all over the place before we reached Verbier and chose the cablecar down to the station at Le Châble and changing at Martigny for Sion.



ALETCHGLETSCHER

For another spectacular walk, we got the train from Sierre to Brig where we transferred to the FO for Fiesch. Getting the cablecar up to Fiescheralp (half way stop to Eggishorn) we started on the Grosser Aletschgletscher walk. Head NE for Märjelensee, reached in 30 minutes. It affords wonderful views up the Glacier to the Jungfrau group with the Aletschhorn dominant



opposite. From here, one heads SW holding on to cables at times to Moosfluh (spot the Matterhorn ahead) eventually arriving at Rieder Furka. It's only a short walk now back to Rieder and one is spoilt for choice returning from this car-free paradise down to the FO at Mörel. This spectacular walk will set you back about five hours and a couple of rolls of film (I normally get through 36 a day on average.)

ON THE FINDELALP

It's quite easy to get to Zermatt with a change at Visp from Sierre.

Take the Sunnegga funicular. A splendid walk from the top heads SE and we soon pass Leisee - the Matterhorn makes a classic reflection - then along the Findelalp past Grindjensee to reach the Findelbach. Then head directly West, coming out at Riffelalp station on the Gornergratbahn after 100 minutes. Make it three hours total by walking back into Zermatt.

GRIMENTZ AND ZINAL

Finally, from Sierre head up to Moiry Dam on the bus. Then walk back to Grimentz, a hidden jewel of a village, mostly traffic free and about 90 minutes away. From here you can make your way into the Zinal valley above Ayer into Zinal itself on paths that parallel the road almost all the way. Allow about four hours for Moiry to Zinal but add to that time for exploring and sampling the delights of Grimentz.

ABOVE: Sion, with the château dominating the town.

BELOW: Grimentz village.
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