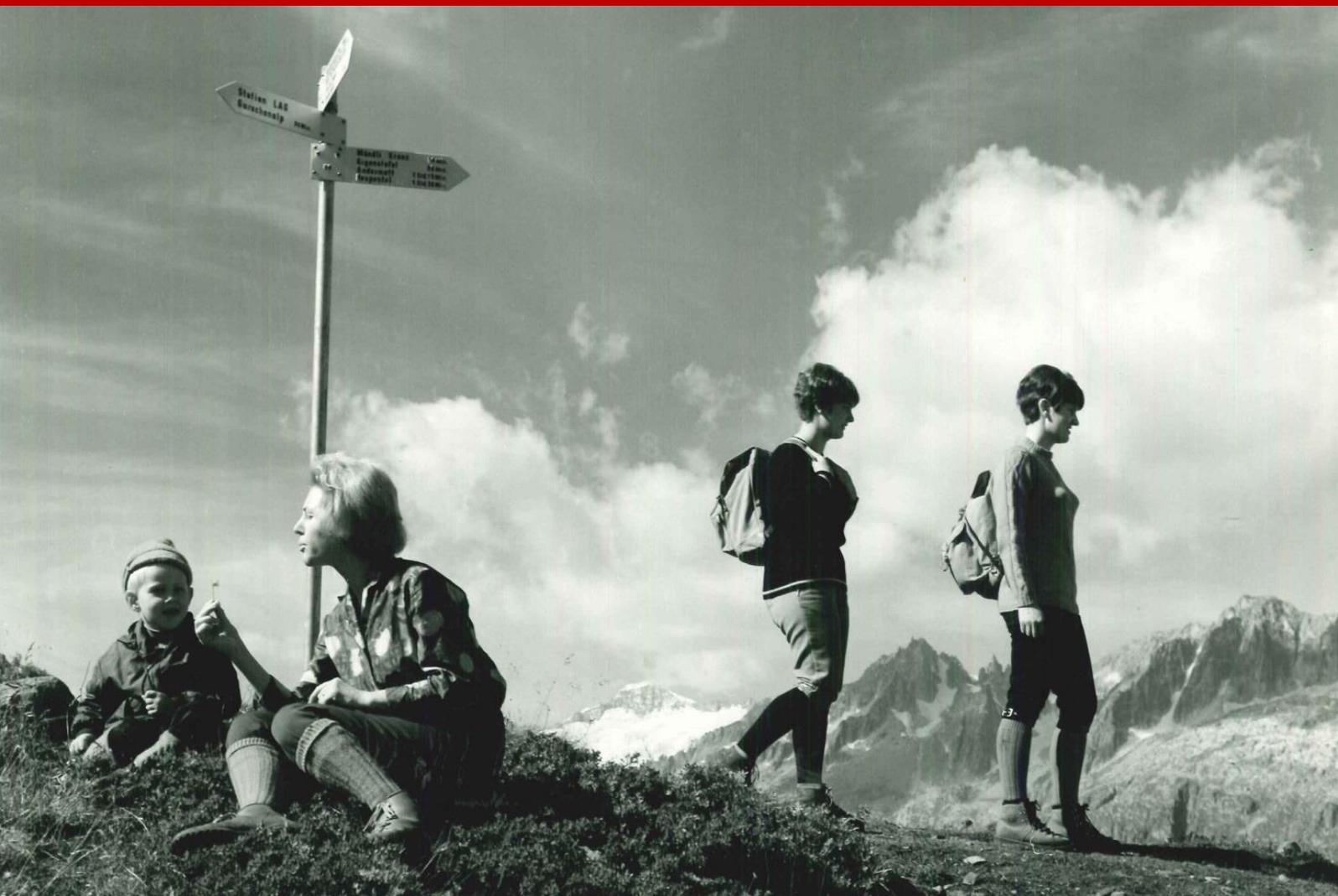# History of Andermatt Holiday Region

For many years the Valley of Ursern was an important departure point for people wanting to cross the Alps. The valley brought together Northern and Southern Europe via three passes - the Gotthard (north-south), the Furka (to the west) and the Oberalp Pass (to the east). The route over the Gotthard was the only one over the Alps that could be achieved by using just one pass. In 1200 the difficult "Schöllenenschlucht" (Schöllenen Gorge) was opened to foot travellers and later, in 1830, this pack-way was expanded to take coaches and sleighs. In 1852 the 15-kilometre long railway tunnel between Göschenen (Canton of Uri) and Airolo (Canton of Tessin or Ticino) was opened and this was considered the longest tunnel in the world until 1905. During this 100-year period the journey over the Gotthard was shortened from several days to just a few hours. In the heyday of the "Säumers" (freight haulers using pack-animals) the journey between Lucerne and the Italian border took between 5-7 days. With the arrival of the Post Coach this journey was reduced to some 24 hours and the opening of the Gotthard railway tunnel further reduced it to 9 hours.

Contents

C. 300-250 BC

- Roman coins from this period were discovered on the Bäzberg-Rossmettlen-Hospental route during excavations in the 1960-'70s and during the construction of the Golf Course. Further discoveries were made on the Fellilücke, near the Oberalp Pass.

C. 100-0 AD

- During this period various indications show the presence of **Roman troops** moving through the Gotthard region. This is confirmed by coin discoveries in the area of Hospental, above Hospental in the Rossmettlen area and further west above the Schöllenen Gorge on the Bäzberg. These belong to the earliest text evidence discovered in the Furka-Gotthard-Oberalp-Pass region.

C. 100-900 AD

- During this period there is evidence of the first seasonal settlements (summer Alps) appearing in the area of Gamsboden, near the present ventilation shaft of the Gotthard road tunnel

C. 900-1300 AD

- Urserntal is transferred to the Bishopric of Chur as part of an inheritance settlement and is managed by the Disentis Abbey as a form of missionary work during the period 900-1100AD.
- Traces of **half-nomadic herdsmen** that come from the southern foothills of the Alps. **The first rural settlement**, "de prato" (on the lowland plains) is noted, the chapel "St.Kolumban"is built and together they evolve into the first permanent colony in the valley.

C. 1200-1380 AD

- Towards the end of the 12th Century **people from Walser**, to the west, immigrate into the Urserntal. The "Germanisation" of the valley follows influencing many of today's names for fields, meadows and local spots.
- Unklike the first settlers from Disentis Abbey the Walser preferred the plains below today's Gurschen woods and not the area around the St. Kolumban chapel. For the first time people are beginning to speak about "Andermatt".
- Probably through the technical abilities of the Walser the **opening of the Schöllenen** Gorge was made possible. This people learnt their technical building skills whilst constructing the so-called "Suonen", the historical irrigation channels that are so plentiful in Wallis.
- The **first two bridges**, the Twärren bridge (c. 1306) and the Devils bridge (1587), were built. The bridges and the track-way along the rock faces were probably made from timber.
- The elected councillors during this time are still subordinate to the Disentis Abbey.
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C. 1382-1410 AD

- With the letter of independence from King Wenzel that brought autonomy, the power relationships changed for the people of Ursern. From now on the people elected, from within their ranks, their own mayor who exercised unreserved jurisdiction and also permitted partial succession from the Abbey at Disentis.
- The first ordinances regarding the **Avalanche Protection Forest** above Andermatt were enacted and the regulation of the Säumer trade begins. In addition, the initial preparations for the perpetuity of land rights with the canton of Uri began in 1410.

C. 1400-1600 AD

- The perpetual land rights with Uri were to protect the **Gotthard access**. The increasing stock- and merchant trade over the Gotthard Pass as well as the ties it produced became ever more important for the people of Ursern.
- There followed **warlike expeditions** together with an influx of people from Uri into the Livinan valley and into northern Italy.
- The concept of providing **mercenaries** begins and in central Switzerland this lasts almost 400 years.
- In the middle of the 15th Century **persecution of witches** begins; this continues in Ursern for almost 200 years.
- Several **avalanches** in the vicinity of both Andermatt and Realp remind the valley population that the forests which provided protection from avalanches require reforestation; however, little is done.
- The disturbances of war in Europe regularly hinder **traffic moving over the local passes** and stir up political-strategic greed on and around the Gotthard Pass.

C. 1600-1700 AD

- What had by now become the most important link over the Gotthard was almost constantly under threat. Due to many concerns about the wars that encircled Switzerland there arose a new need for security and troops were stationed here in order to defend and protect the interests of merchants and the Abbey.
- In general it was fair to say that the 17th Century was politically, socially and climatically one of extremes. Even without a war on the boundaries of the Gotthard this was a particularly unstable time and the people of Userntal needed considerable luck and deftness to remain unscathed during this period.
- In 1649 and with the help of the County of Uri, the people of Ursern were able to purchase their freedom from the control of Disentis.
- This was also the era of witch-hunting. Apparently introduced from the Leventina - also known as the Witch Valley - the hunting and torture of women was established here. Until about 1668 women were tortured in Ursern and confessions were brutally extracted - only with such a confession could the women be killed. In Ursern this was done by beheading them with a sword. In 1668, Katharina Simon, known in the valley as the "Küngenen", was the last-but-one "witch" in Switzerland to be sentenced to death and executed. The country's very last "witch", Anna Göldi was killed about a century later.

Climatically this century was marked by harsh winters that often brought more than a metre of snow into the valley during July. Particularly during the beginning and end of the century very long, cold winters are documented. Avalanche disasters and repeated hay and food shortages led to catastrophic conditions.

- The hard-won route through the Schöllenen Gorge was improved and simultaneously tested by terrible weather and flooding. In September 1640 the complete valley was submerged and roads and bridges destroyed. The first stone bridge, built in c. 1585, had survived just 60 years and needed to be replaced at all costs. During this time the Schöllenen had to be passed by way of the Bäzberg or through the Rien valley via Gütsch. Damage to the roads and bridges was paid for within a few years by raising customs charges. Despite this is became obvious that the infrastructure in the Schöllenen Gorge had to be improved and made safer.

C. 1700-1800 AD

- The beginning of the new century began with terrible weather and flooding, requiring the improvement and better protection in the Schöllenen Gorge. In 1707 the first projecst to bypass the Kirchberg cliff and to **replace the Twärren bridge** were presented.

- On the Lukmanier and Albula Passes in the county of Bündnerland, gunpowder is used for the first time. Pietro Morettini, an experienced fortress builder from the Maggia valley, offers to breach the cliff walls. He manages this in just 11 months and is known today as the builder of the first Alpine tunnel. The original dimensions of the tunnel were 2.1m in width, 2.4m in height and 60m long - however Morettini miscalculated the costs completely and was technically bankrupt. The

Post-coach in front of the first alpine tunnel "Urnerloch", Andermatt

people of Ursern and Uri realised the incredible benefit the tunnel brought them and decided to raise customs charges. Morettini was cleared of all debts and received a bonus.

- With the **improved access** many more goods and travellers could be transported. Added to this, local produce, for instance the renowned Ursern cheese or the valley crystal was marketed throughout Europe.

- 1766 was a memorable year with a **village fire** on 9th September changing the face of Andermatt completely. Over 100 fires raged in stables and houses; the new village church, the village hall and chancellery, the hospital and armoury, all fell to the flames. It would take almost 20 years before the village was rebuilt and it's from this time that the old mountain-pass style "village character" of building in the older parts of Andermatt (Haus Babylon, Ochsen Restaurant) emerged.

- There were also consequences for the Ursern valley towards the end of the century, as Switzerland was occupied by the French. Austria, England and Russia decided to stop the advances of **Napoleon** in Switzerland and, under the command of **General Suworow**, sent troops from the south. Although the Russians had never fought in the mountains before, in just a few weeks Suworow managed to move from Milan, take the Gotthard and drive the French out of the Reuss river valley. But the legendary campaign through central Switzerland was not all

crowned in glory - the battle at Zürich, led by General Korsakow, was lost. Suddenly Suworow became the prey instead of the hunter, but managed to escape at the last minute via the Muota Valley and the Panixer Pass in the upper Rhine valley and on to the town of Thun.

- A hundred years later, the Suworow Memorial was erected and dedicated near the Devil's Bridge, to recall the battle there.
- This century left **deep marks** in the Ursern Valley. Notable changes both politically and socially would be made in the coming decades. The road and transport infrastructure, which had not been modernised for some time, began to suffer as commercial traffic increased. Bridges and roads suffered badly from natural forces and the warlike operations around the Gotthard threatened to destroy the route.
- Economic interests in the south as well as to the north of the Gotthard became the basis for the investment required to finally make the Gotthard route navigable.
- Even before the Gotthard route was passable the German writer **Goethe** began his travels through Switzerland. It was his reports and accounts about the mountains, the countryside and nature between the Vierwaldstättersee (Lace Lucerne) and the Gotthard Pass that made the region known to the general public. His reports to his friend, the author Schiller, on the land and people so inspired him that he wrote a completely new and impressive story about William Tell. In this way the region became known and the way cleared for the arrival of tourism and Alpinism in central Switzerland.

C. 1800-1900 AD

- After some delays the route over the Gotthard, from Flüelen to Lugano was completed in two stages, from 1818-1826 and from 1826-1830. During this period the new Devil's Bridge was built, c. 1830. The travelling time between Flüelen and the Swiss-Italian border at Lugano was reduced from several days to just 24 hours.
- The driving force here was the young canton of Ticino which, shortly after joining the Swiss Confederation, very quickly realised the importance of this route and forced the pace of improvements.
- As of 1840 horse-drawn carts and coaches, then the **five-horse Post Coach**, began to ply the Gotthard route. Twice daily the express connection passed through the valley and the beginnings of tourism began to show as ever more people were travelling. By 1880 there were almost 60000 people moving along the Gotthard route.
- The **Gotthard** route was **open all the yea**r round - in summer with carts and coaches, in winter by sleighs. As the Post, which had been nationalised in 1849, became more important, convoys of more than 40 sleighs were a common sight.
- The pass and its maintenance, the constant repairs, snow clearance, the packers and packway stations, and not least the customs, brought considerable **wealth** into the canton of Uri and the Ursern Valley.
- In the second half of the century the first hotels were built - guest-houses and hostels were already present. Political stability and the Constitution from 1848 permitted a regulated transit of the pass, and soon **tourism settled in alongside trade**. There was sufficient accommodation for the business trade, but with 40-60 people travelling through daily, capacity was strained. Hotel owners began to appear who wanted to reach higher standards.

-   The Hotel Gotthard was the **first in the valley** and this started a contest to see who could build the next one. Shortly afterwards the Hotel Meyerhof appeared in Hospental and then in 1870 the Hotel Bellevue's foundations were laid.
    During this time other ideas governing transit traffic began to surface. The first project to cross the Alps more quickly, be it through the mountains or over them, was presented.
    After several ideas Italy, the German Reich and Switzerland agreed, in a state treaty of 1871, on the Flüelen-Göschenen-Airolo-Lugano railway connection. With this act the downfall of the Gotthard Pass connection was sealed. With the opening of the **Gotthard Railway tunnel** in 1882 and even more so in 1884, when regular train connections began to run on the Gotthard Route, an economic crisis broke out. Almost overnight business on the Gotthard Pass route collapsed and it would take many years before tourism began to compensate for the loss of trade and commercial enterprise connections.
-   In approximately 1870 political upheaval in Europe led to serious concerns within the military about the defence of the country. The word **"Reduit"** (reduced or scaled-down development) marked thought processes in this era. With the presence of intentional borders very near to the Ursern Valley and its strategic position, the Reduit had an immediate effect on the development of the valley.
-   In 1890 the **first military facilities** were built around the Gotthard. The construction of barracks, bunkers and fortresses brought work into the valley and migration away from the area ceased.
-   During the last 20 years of the 19th Century large investments in national defence were carried out in the region. The **Gotthard Fortress** proper began during this period and as a side product various roads and tunnels were improved and the pass routes over the Gotthard, Furka and Oberalp were dramatically developed in line with the fortress concept.

1900-to date

-   The development of the passes continued and the railways stood for advancement and mobility. The army profited from the benefits of the Gotthard railway tunnel and continued to expand the building of fortresses around the Ursern Valley. Access was improved and various projects to expand the rail and road network were introduced. At this time some dramatic project ideas were being put forward - for instance it was suggested that almost every important mountain peak should be able to be reached by rail and the Mediterranean should be connected by canal with the Rhine.
-   During this era, there seemed to be no limits to the latest technological prowess and skills of the industrial age, and the public's faith in **modern technique.** No sooner was the Gotthard Railway tunnel completed - at the end of the century - than the country's first electricity generating station was completed. At the beginning of the 20th century, various similar projects were introduced along the Ursern valley. In Hospental (1902) and in Realp (1913) the local corporation built electricity stations and these would evolve into the Ursern Generating Board. (EWU)
-   Progress and evolution were now unstoppable - soon it was time for the next big development: the **automobile**. The canton of Uri imposed a strict embargo on these "petrol-coaches". This happened primarily to protect the horse drawn carriages and the businesses behind them. The arrival of the car, however, could not be stopped. As of 1909, cars officially crossed the Gotthard

Pass and demonstrated that it was a safe, secure and quick transport medium. It would be late in the 20th Century, however, before the 19th century tax was lifted.

- At this time the **builders of railroads** were highly motivated by the success of the Gotthard route to construct more tunnels and mountain railways. Plans to join the Rhone valley with that of the Rhine collapsed due to lack of finance and the extremely difficult geology at the Furka and Oberalp passes. In addition there was political confusion and the first indications of World War 1 breaking out. It became ever more difficult to identify and secure finance or to attract craftsmen from surrounding countries. The work on the Oberwald-Furka-Andermatt-Oberalp Pass route was suspended in 1916 due to military concerns. The Schöllenen Gorge railway route came to the fore and from its beginning, 1917, was electrified.

- Meanwhile the **tourism industry** - greatly reduced but slowly building again - also profited from technological advances. Travel via rail was cheaper and hotels on the Furka, Gotthard and Oberalp Pass were easier to reach by car. In addition the valley enjoyed a short but intensive tourist wave that continued until the beginning of **World War 1**. Even though several hotels were forced to close due to the war roads were improved enabling car traffic to flourish. Shortly after the end of the conflict, Post Buses were using the Oberalp and Furka Passes again and by 1922 they were also crossing the Gotthard.

- **Between the two World Wars** many important projects were realised. In 1926 the Furka-Oberalp Railway route was opened and in 1937 the first ski lift in the valley was opened at Nätschen railway station.

- World War 2 was the next great setback for tourism and the importance of the "Reduit" (scaling down) in and around the Gotthard Region took on added significance. During the war "Fortress Troops" were called into service and Andermatt became a central point in the Fortress system. The Army was suddenly the most important employer in the Urner Upper Regions.

- While all this was going on, the valley was threatened for many years by the **Ursern-Rheinwald dam project.** Many of the plans for generating power during this time were based on hydro-electricity. This project however was not for a small dam but one for the complete valley - a dam at the Schöllenen Gorge was scheduled to be flooded. The local population, however, mounted an aggressive opposition and in 1946 the project was cancelled.

- At the beginning of the '60s the **second ski lift in the valley** was built above Hospental on the slopes of the Winterberg and in 1963 construction of a cable car from the village to the top of Gemsstock began. Ski tourism was further encouraged throughout Switzerland by the success of Bernhard Russi in the early '70s leading to a boom in ski lift construction. With the army as the largest employer, however, economic pressure on the valley was low and therefore little emphasis was placed on competition and innovation.

- The turn-around point and next crisis came with the end of the Cold War, towards the mid '90s. The Fortress Corps and diverse other branches in the Armed Forces were reduced or dissolved and a situation arose that no one thought possible, the Army, the greatest employer, began to reduce its presence in the valley.

- In 2005, the Egyptian businessman Samih Sawiris was invited to Andermatt and shortly afterwards the "Andermatt Swiss Alps" Tourist Project was established.

History of Alpine winter sports in Switzerland

Beginning of the 18th Century	The first climbing expeditions in high-alpine zones.
Belle Époque 1870-1914.	Rapid expansion of tourism in the Alps primarily titled and aristocratic, well-to-do families.
Mid-19th Century.	Many first ascents of mountain peaks in Switzerland, chiefly by the British.
1937.	3rd Ski lift in Switzerland built in Andermatt.
World War 1.	Tourism stops. Rapid industrial expansion brought about by the war followed by a boom in ski lift building.
Between the Wars.	Beginning of the Winter Season for the Masses.
World War 2.	Stagnation but domestic tourism begins.
Globalization.	Charter Flights with affordable prices, first booking systems appear.

At Nätschen, Andermatt

Celebrated visitors to the Andermatt Holiday Region

Heads of government/royals:

Queen Victoria, Queen of the United Kingdom

Ulysses Simpson Grant, President of the United States

Sir Winston Churchill, Prime-minister of Great Britain

Artists:

Francesco Petrarca, Italian writer

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German writer

William Turner, British painter

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, German composer and conductor

Charles Dickens, British writer (Oliver Twist)

Richard Wagner, German composer

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, British writer (Sherlock Holmes)

Sean Connery, the first James Bond

Elvis Presley, American entertainer

Other famous visitors:

Carlo Borromeo, Cardinal, Archbishop of Mailand

General Suworow, Russian General

Alexander von Humboldt, German nature scientist

Guillaume-Henri Dufour, joint founder of the International Red Cross

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Pictures: **Post-coach in front of the first Alpine tunnel "Urnerloch", Andermatt**
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Pictures: **At Nätschen, Andermatt**
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