

## WAYS AND MEANS IN THE ALPS.

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Perhaps the most practical way of considering the financial aspect of summer climbing in the Alps will be to discuss, one by one, the actual items of necessary expenditure. From the data thus obtained it may be possible to prepare a reasonably definite "alpine budget" at least in so far as minimum costs are concerned, and other considerations related to the question can be introduced and compared. Those who have not been to the Alps before and climbers who wish to keep expenses down to a reasonable minimum need most help, and it is for them that the following information is primarily given.

The biggest economy on an alpine holiday is to travel 3rd class via Dieppe instead of 2nd class via Calais or Boulogne. A number of climbers, both ladies and gentlemen, have tried and what is more, have repeated this experiment and found it quite satisfactory. On many of the trains there is padded and sprung upholstery, on others the seats are like wooden tram seats though more closely moulded to the anatomy than those of the Birmingham Corporation. It may be submitted, however, that to many temperaments a night in the train is to be endured rather than enjoyed and a little extra discomfort makes but slight difference, whereas the knowledge of a saving of £3 or £4, practically equivalent to a whole week's pension, provides a soothing compensation. If economies have to be made it would also seem reasonable to make them on that part of one's holiday which is least productive of pleasure. It should be noted, however, that in a few cases the train services via Dieppe, on the outward journey only, are such that a night in London or at some intermediate place en route may be necessitated; the latter alternative is suggested as being less expensive and perhaps more interesting.

Other cheap routes are via the Folkestone—Dunkerque night crossing, or Dover—Ostend—Brussels; they are only really suitable, however, for resorts approached via Bâle or Berne.

The actual choice of a resort also has a considerable bearing on this big item of expenditure, the railway fare.

The comparison between climbing from a fixed centre and touring from place to place over peaks and passes need hardly be considered here. The latter method, unless it is organised with the greatest care and experience and favoured by the weather, will be very much more expensive. On the other hand a move from one centre to another might be made at the end of a week without entailing much extra cost. Generally speaking the resorts in France involve the least expensive journeys, and by resorts is meant only those alpine centres whence the huts and lesser peaks are directly approached on foot. Thus of the three great alpine centres, Grindelwald, Zermatt and Chamonix, the French one, Chamonix, costs least to reach, the return fare from London being £9 16s. 8d.,\* 2nd class via Boulogne, or £5 19s. 4d., 3rd via Dieppe. In fact the Chamonix valley generally is the least expensive climbing centre, large or small, from several points of view.

Of lesser resorts in France, reached at approximately the same cost, other villages in the Chamonix valley (such as Argentière) and Pralognan or Val d'Isère in the Tarentaise may be cited. To reach Bonneval via Modane would cost only a few shillings more and the return journey to the great Dauphiné centres of La Grave and La Bérarde costs about £10 10s. od., 2nd class via Boulogne, or £6 15s. od., 3rd via Dieppe, including motor diligence from Grenoble.

The less expensive Swiss resorts are only a little more costly to reach than those of France, thanks to the 30% reduction to foreign tourists on the Swiss Railways and Post Coaches.

Generally speaking those of Central and Western Switzerland are most attractive from the present point of view. Kandersteg, Les Diablerets, Champéry, Les Plans sur Bex and Engelberg may be cited, the fares costing about £10 5s. od. 2nd class and £6 5s. od. 3rd class. For a little more Grindelwald or Champex may be reached. The famous Valais resorts, Fionnay, Arolla, Zinal, being at the head of long lateral valleys and away from railways, involve rather more expensive journeys, *e.g.*, Arolla £11 2s. od.

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\*Prices throughout are those current during last summer (1933), when the rates of exchange were approximately 84 French francs or 17 Swiss francs to the £.

(2nd) or £7 3s. od. (3rd), and even the enthusiast who walks right up from the Rhone valley will probably wish he had chosen another place long before he arrives at his destination. The journey to Pontresina and elsewhere in Eastern Switzerland is more costly than that to Zermatt, which is £11 5s. od. (2nd) or £7 17s. od. (3rd).

In the Italian Alps such a centre as Courmayeur may be reached, via Bourg St. Maurice and the Little St. Bernard pass, the return fare, including autos, being about £10 12s. od. (2nd) or £6 17 od. (3rd). Some other famous Italian districts, such as the Dolomites and Ortler Alps, are too far away to come within the present consideration.

Some of the Austrian centres on the other hand, though distant are attractive on account of the very low cost of living in that country, although the fares are high, *e.g.*, Oetzthal, £13 15s. od. (2nd) or £8 14s. od. (3rd). A party contemplating a longer holiday with climbing of a generally rather lower standard amongst less known mountains might find the Oetzthal or Stubaithal inexpensive and satisfactory centres.

So much for railway fares and resorts, for it is quite beyond the scope of the present paper to discuss the relative merits of the places mentioned or the many others available. It may be useful to mention that lunch or dinner on the trains costs about 6s. 6d., and that if the journey must be broken, a good dinner, bed and breakfast may be obtained en route for less than ten shillings.

With regard to hotels, experience seems to show that it is less expensive to engage a room and pay the ordinary pension rate for the whole period. This applies even to the climber who hopes to spend a great deal of time in the huts, for it can be arranged at the outset that full provisions for one, two or more nights out can be supplied in lieu of meals in the hotel. The other method of laying in a stock of sardines, cheese and maggi soup at the village store might save money if weather and other circumstances permitted everything to go according to plan. Usually a number of days will have to be spent down in the valley and then it is that the *à la carte* prices one has to pay entirely upset the exchequer. The pension rates on the other hand are so very reasonable

that one need not cavil at seeming to pay for a bed one does not happen to occupy more than once or twice a week, and in bad weather the pension arrangement is particularly advantageous.

In the matter of actual hotel charges the French resorts again show a slight economy. A good average price for pension at a French hotel may be taken as 45 francs per day (11s. 3d.) and excellent accommodation may be obtained at 35 francs (8s. 9d.) or even less. In Switzerland corresponding rates would be about 10.50 francs (13s.) and the minimum about 8 francs (9s. 8d.). It may be mentioned here that the cheapest pension rate at a good hotel, which only means a bedroom on an upper floor, is usually to be preferred to an equal rate at smaller hotels, since the food and other resources of the better hotel are at one's disposal.

The last big item of expense is the cost of guides. This is most formidable and is undoubtedly one of the reasons for the great increase in guideless climbing in recent years. There is a great deal to be said, apart from questions of expense, for purchasing a map and guidebook and tackling easy climbs unguided, working cautiously up the scale of difficulty and having special regard for the different conditions existing in the Alps, the greater distances, the more serious possibilities of bad weather, the quality of the rocks, condition of the mountain, the danger of falls of rock and ice, route finding and so on. Snow and ice, moreover, require a technique and experience which is not obtainable at home even in Scotland. Novices who contemplate guideless climbing would be well advised to find experienced amateurs to help them in the earlier stages. Certain it is that they will have to find companions to share the cost if they are to undertake expeditions with guides. Tariffs for the ordinary routes up the big Swiss peaks vary from about 50—100 or more Swiss francs (£3—£6); in France from say 250—400 French francs. In lesser resorts there may be a number of lower peaks for which tariffs may be from 40—50 Swiss francs or 150—250 French francs. In addition to the guides' tariff there are their provisions, solid and liquid, tips and the Hut Fees (about 2s. 6d. per night for Club members and twice this for non-members). Guides may also be engaged by the week, in which case the charge is about £2 or a little less per day.

Finally there are the various small sundries incidental to every holiday and, unless a very close watch is kept, here lies the danger of spoiling all one's careful calculations. Pension rates can be bartered down to the lowest limit, but those pleasant trifles of afternoon tea, bières, coffees, baths!, postcards, postages and so on mount up at an alarming rate and this, one rather regrets to write, is particularly apparent when staying with our good friends the Swiss. In France, though the exchange rate is equally adverse to the £, the cost of living is unquestionably lower, and so the virtue of cleanliness or fortuitous hospitality is thereby encouraged.

Summarising the costs for a member of an amateur party spending a fortnight in the Alps we have, as reasonable minimum approximations, the following:—

	£	s.	d.
Return rail fare from London (3rd class)...	6	0	0
Ditto Birmingham to London ...	0	18	6
Meals, etc., <i>en route</i> , if required* ...	1	10	0
14 days' pension in the hotel at 9/- ...	6	6	0
Hotel tips and other sundries ...	1	0	0
Hut charges, extra provisions and general sundries, say— ...	3	0	0
<i>Total</i> ...	£18	14	6

It has been done for this, and the absolute minimum would be appreciably lower.

If guides are employed the extra cost will be large. With two companions, however, some good peaks could be climbed for another £8 or £10. A further economy could be made by travelling out with a tourist agent's party to obtain the 30% party reduction on the fare. The climber would, of course, be quite free to select his own hotel, arrange his expeditions and return independently.

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\*Some experienced travellers take their own provisions.