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by train, bus and boat.

History I:

The Gotthard Route – world-class historical heritage

No other traffic route in the world has shaped a country to the extent with which the Gotthard route has shaped Switzerland, says historian Kilian T. Elsasser. The expert on the history of transport is dedicated to the preservation of the Gotthard region's historical heritage.

Kilian T. Elsasser knows the historical transformation of the Gotthard transport landscape like the back of his hand. The historian and head of the museum consultancy Museumsfabrik (Museum Factory) emphasises that Switzerland's very existence is inseparably linked with the Gotthard Massif. The opening of the continuous pack mule trail in the 13th century transformed the pass crossing of regional significance into the political and economic backbone of the cantons bordering on Lake Lucerne.

The opening of the railway line in the 19th century established the Gotthard as the most important north-south link through the Alps and Switzerland as a neutral transit country in Europe. For a long time, the Gotthard Railway was one of Switzerland's largest tourist attractions. Every third international visitor came specifically to see and experience the marvel of engineering that was the Gotthard Railway and the majestic Alpine landscape – the “cradle of Switzerland”, as evocatively described by the Nobel Literature Prize laureate Carl Spitteler in his 1897 travel guide «Der Gotthard» (“The Gotthard”). “The Gotthard line was so profitable that it subsidised the Swiss Federal Railways until the motorway opened in 1980,” Elsasser explains. “Besides the numerous technical world records and density of archaeological transport stratification, the Gotthard's political impact makes it a unique pass crossing. There is no comparable transport landscape in the world which has shaped a country in the same way.”

Elsasser stresses the immense historical relevance of the Gotthard transit routes for Switzerland. He is committed to preserving the old Gotthard route beyond the commissioning of the Gotthard Base Tunnel and is an advocate for its inclusion as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Kilian T. Elsasser studied Public History in Boston, USA. He was curator of rail transport at the Swiss Museum of Transport in Lucerne for 13 years and launched the Museumsfabrik museum consultancy in 2004. An author and editor of a number of publications on Swiss transport history, Elsasser published the book «Der direkte Weg in den Süden: Die Geschichte der Gotthardbahn» (“The direct route to the South: the history of the Gotthard Railway”) and «Wanderweg Gottardo: Zu Fuss entlang der Gotthardbahn» (“The Gotthard trail: walking along the Gotthard Railway”) in 2007. «Die drei Weltrekorde am Gotthard» (“The three world records on the Gotthard”), co-authored with Alexander Grass, and the village tour of Göschenen «Quatro, tre, due, uno – whaaam!» will be published in May 2016.

Museumsfabrik: Based in Lucerne, the Museumsfabrik (Museum Factory) provides comprehensive consultancy services to museums, designs and holds own exhibitions and educational programmes and manages the BLS Foundation. The Museumsfabrik also researches and writes about the history of the railway and transit routes on the Gotthard – from the early pack mule trail to the modern motorway. The company covers a broad range of projects from scientific publications and documentaries to popularly written articles.