



Switzerland.
by train, bus and boat.

History II:

The Gotthard – at the cutting edge of history

The history of the traffic routes crossing over and through the Gotthard Massif is inextricably linked with Switzerland's history and legends. The literary scientist Boris Previsic has examined both in depth.

The Gotthard Massif is charged with national symbolism like almost no other landscape in Switzerland. It not only links the country's disparate geographical and climatic regions but also the four distinct languages and cultures.

The construction of the first continuous pack mule trail in the 13th century brought the Gotthard Pass Europe-wide significance as a central trade and traffic route across the Alps. And it was no coincidence that the founding cantons of the Swiss Confederation forged their first alliances with one another during the same period. Or so the official national historical narrative goes until the 1980s. The opening of the Gotthard train tunnel in 1882 – the world's longest tunnel at the time – thrust the Gotthard as a rail link through the Alps into the international spotlight. In the course of a Europe-wide trend towards national unity and its relating symbolism, Switzerland was defining its origins largely in line with Schiller's *Tell*. In the same vein, August 1st was declared Swiss National Day in 1891.

Switzerland is once again about to open a tunnel through the Gotthard. It is once again the longest train tunnel in the world and once again, Switzerland's connecting role at the heart of Europe is being highlighted – more than reason enough to take stock and look forward. Prof Dr Boris Previsic organized a lecture series about the Gotthard in autumn 2015 at the University of Lucerne – the city where the 1871-founded Gotthard Railway Company was based. Previsic the literary scientist has examined in detail the writings surrounding the Gotthard and illustrates in a fascinating manner how the Gotthard region has forged Swiss national identity and history while at the same time demonstrating an enormous degree of internationality: merchants and pilgrims, migrant workers and writers from all over the globe were and still are lured by the transit route on the Gotthard. For centuries, this much-travelled massif reaching up to the roof of Europe has been at one with itself at the cutting edge of history.

Boris Previsic has held a SNF professorship for literary and cultural studies at the University of Lucerne since 2015. The literary scientist and trained concert flautist supports art projects from Eastern Europe to the Alps. Besides his lecture series «Gotthardfantasien» ("Gotthard Fantasies") at the University of Lucerne, Previsic has also edited the same-named volume on the Gotthard, which will be brought out in June 2016 by the Swiss publisher HIER UND JETZT to commemorate the official inaugural opening of the Gotthard Base Tunnel.

Gotthard Railway Company: The Gotthardbahn-Gesellschaft (GB) was founded in Lucerne in 1871 with the purpose of building and operating the Gotthard Railway. The new company was presided over by the Swiss politician, business leader and railway entrepreneur Alfred Escher.

Existing Gotthard Train Tunnel: Opened in 1882, 15 kilometres long and at the time the world's longest railway tunnel. The tunnel was largely excavated by Italian workers from the Piedmont and Lombardy regions under precarious conditions, and two very young neighbouring countries of Switzerland – Italy and the German Reich – carried the main financial burden.