

The Simplon Tunnel

THE SIMPLON STORY

The commemorative stamp issued this year (1956) celebrated, strictly speaking, only the opening of the first tunnel gallery. The story of the tunnel, one of the greatest engineering feats in railway history, goes back to the year 1877 when M. Lommel, the chief engineer of the "Compagnie du Chemin de Fer", a privately owned undertaking, produced the first plans for the tunnel.

The Swiss and Italian governments and private enterprise in both countries agreed, after many years of study, to finance the ambitious project for the building of a 19,803m long tunnel, the cost of which was estimated at the then fantastic sum of over 700 million Swiss francs.



A state treaty was concluded between Switzerland and Italy on 25th November 1895 and on 1st August 1898 the first drill was put to the rock near Brig, on the north side of the tunnel. After 6 years and 208 days of almost superhuman effort, at 7.20 in the evening, the last hole had been drilled - letting light into the tunnel on its south end. It was the 24th of February 1905, a date that made history.

Landslides, flooding, avalanches and huge caving-in had been fought and conquered. On 1st June 1906 the first regular train service ran through the Simplon providing the shortest railway link between Northern and Western Europe with the South and the Orient. The First World War interrupted construction of the second gallery and it took many years until in 1922 the tunnel was completed, allowing for two-track traffic.

THE SIMPLON JUBILEE

On the occasion of the official celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Simplon Tunnel on 18 May, the PTT issued three special postmarks, which were applied on that day only. One was in use at the Lausanne Comptoir Suisse post office. It was a circular date postmark, with the inscription "LAUSANNE" at top and "1906-JUBILE DU SIMPLON 1956" below, while the centre shows the tunnel entrance flags and a laurel wreath.



On the same day the Brig Post Office used an attractive rectangular postmark, with a similar illustration at the right-hand half and the inscriptions "50 JAHRE SIMPLON-TUNNEL" "1906-1956" and "BRIG-18.MAI" at the left.

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Note: the information given above has not been verified for accuracy