

# MOUNTAIN CLIMBING

## with *Sailplanes*

By DR. W. DOLFUS

THE Alps have always played an important part in Switzerland's aviation. The first crossings were made in a balloon by Spelterini and de Beauclair in the nineties and followed, at the beginning of this century, by the tragic conquest of the Simplon pass by George Chavez in an airplane in 1910. Flights over the Jungfrau were made by Bider in 1913, and Mittelholzer gave hundreds of passengers their first alpine flight.

Soaring flight too has conquered the Swiss Alps since 1931 with increasing success. Willi Farner was the first to fly over the world famous Rigi mountain in Central Switzerland, and in the same year he took off from the Jungfraujoch at 12,000 feet above sea level for a two hour flight to Lucerne. In 1935 expert pilots participated at an international soaring camp on the Jungfraujoch. Here H. Schreiber of Switzerland carried out a flight to the foot of the Alps, an experiment which he successfully repeated in 1937 by taking off from Rochers-de-Naye above Montreux.

During the war gliding and soaring remained the only possible activity for the amateur pilot. However, as only a few areas were de-restricted for military reasons, it was impossible to carry out distance flights. As a consequence, soaring pilots explored the meteorological and topographic possibilities of these areas to the utmost. Several camps and contests took place every year in the alpine districts: in the Grisons the camps of Flims, Davos-Parsenn and Samaden/St. Moritz; in the western part of Switzerland those of Rochers-de-Naye and Pleiades above Montreux/Vevey; Villars in

the Canton Vaud; and Crans in the lower Valais. Samaden/St. Moritz in the Engadine developed particularly into the actual center of alpine soaring flight. During the summer months hundreds of hours were flown there, with flights of 9 hours duration and altitudes up to 13,000 feet. Passenger flights over the whole Bernina group became quite usual.

During the week of July 21, 1946, a new area was opened for soaring flight—the world famous mountaineering center of Zermatt. Four experienced pilots, Alwin Kuhn, Max Schachenmann, Karl Haberstick and Fritz Glur, were invited by the Seiler Hotels to explore the country around Zermatt for its suitability for soaring flight. Kuhn flew a Moswey III, Glur a Spalinger S 22, Haberstick and Schachenmann each a Spalinger S 18 sailplane. The planes were catapulted from a wooden slipway installed above Riffelberg station on the Gornergrat Railway at an altitude of 9,500 feet and landed close to the Zermatt station on a field 650 by 100 feet. On the first day only gliding flights were made to try take-off and landing conditions. They proved to be excellent. On the second day gains in altitude of 1600 feet and flights of 1 hour 40 minutes were made. Achievements on the following days improved as the most favorable spots for thermals were located.

Alwin Kuhn succeeded in completely circling the king of Zermatt, the Matterhorn, at an altitude of 13,000 feet. He and Schachenmann discovered near the Unter- and Ober-Rothorn large areas of upcurrents

*Photos by Heimgartner, Zurich*



Transporting the sailplanes on the Gornergrat Railway from Zermatt to Riffelberg.



The fuselage of the Moswey III being taken from Riffelberg Station to the starting point.