

ALBRECHT VON HALLER'S ALPINE JOURNEYS

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THE various and numerous Alpine journeys which Albrecht von Haller undertook between 1728 and 1761 were enumerated by him and described very briefly (and incompletely) in the Preface to his great work on the plants of Switzerland,¹ published in 1768. Very few of these journeys, unfortunately, formed the subject of detailed accounts. That of 1728, *Récit du premier voyage dans les Alpes*, has been published on more than one occasion.² Similarly the tour of 1731 was described and published under the title *Descriptio itineris alpini suscepti M. Julio Anni 1731*.³ The late M. Henri Mettrier has published a manuscript in the *Bibliothèque Mazarine* entitled 'Troisième relation d'un voyage fait sur les Alpes,' which he has ascribed to the year 1732.⁴ For reasons which I shall now give, this attribution of date cannot be correct.

First, as regards the itinerary, in his *Preface* of 1768 Haller summarized his journey of 1732 as follows: 'Anno 1732 in Ill. etiam olim Viri Augusti Johannis de Hugo gratiam glacialia montis *Grindelwald*, tum montem *Scheidek* superavi, Valesiam aditurus, nisi turbæ ejus Reipublicæ populares me absterruissent, montem tamen *Rothenhorn*, supra *Brienz*, conscendi.'

There is reason to believe that in his work of 1768, and elsewhere, Haller occasionally made mistakes in his dates; but there cannot be any question of error in this entry for 1732, for the riots in the Valais during that year are a historic fact. They were occasioned by popular resentment against the concession for the iron mines in the Binntal which had been granted to an Englishman, Mr. Mandel, as I have related elsewhere.⁵ In M. Mettrier's manuscript, however, Haller crosses the Grimsel and descends the Valais; there is no ascent of the Brienz Rothorn. He goes on to say 'les endroits que nous vîmes ensuite sont indiqués dans la première relation,' from which it may be inferred that he crossed the Gemmi on his return to Berne.

From its itinerary, therefore, M. Mettrier's manuscript cannot

¹ *Historia stirpium indigenarum Helvetiæ inchoata*, Bernæ, 1768.

² Walter von Arx: 'Albrecht von Haller's erste Alpenreise (1728),' *Revue Helvétique*, 1, 1892; Albert de Haller: *Récit du premier voyage dans les Alpes*, Hausmann A.-G., St. Gallen, 1948.

³ *Tempe Helvetica*, 1, 1735; *Opuscula botanica*, Gottingæ, 1749.

⁴ H. Mettrier: *Relation d'un voyage de Albert de Haller dans l'Oberland Bernois*, Langres, 1906. It was also printed in the *Revue Alpine* vol. x, but with few notes, over the names of H. Mettrier and W. A. B. Coolidge.

⁵ G. R. de Beer: *Escape to Switzerland*, London, 1945.

refer to the year 1732, but it agrees with all that is known of Haller's journey of 1736. Curiously enough, M. Mettrier considered this possibility and rejected it on the supposed grounds that in 1736 Haller 'se rendit au Saint-Gothard par le Col de la Furka.' But this is wholly incorrect. Haller himself in his *Preface* of 1768, wrote: '1736 . . . cum nobilissimis viris, qui ab eo tempore ad primas in patria dignitates evecti fuerunt, valles *Lauterbrunn* & *Grindelwald*, & montem *Scheidek* peragravi. Porro Genevam profectus montem *Dolaz*, & nobilem per suas stirpes montem *Thuri* conscendi. Iterum, longo itinere, solus per *Tigurum* & *Altdorfium* in *Gotthardum* montem, inde per *Furcam* & *Grimsulam*, culmina alpium, iter feci . . .'

Far from going from the Grimsel to the Furka, Haller made an excursion to Geneva before starting again on a fresh tour, alone, in the course of which he returned from the St. Gotthard by going over the Furka to the Grimsel. M. Mettrier's argument is therefore based on nothing but an easily demonstrable error.

The same conclusion emerges from a consideration of the month in which Haller's journeys of 1732 and 1736 were made. This information is revealed by the letters which Haller wrote to Johann Gesner.^{5a} From these it may be seen that in 1732 the journey began on July 22; in 1736 already by July 11 Haller had not only finished the journey in question but also his journey to Geneva. M. Mettrier's manuscript begins: "Sur la fin du mois de juin, je partis . . ." This must therefore refer to 1736, and not to 1732.

Next there is the evidence to be gleaned from Haller's companions. In 1732, as the *Preface* specifies, he had but one: Johann August Hugo, Physician to the Court of Hanover, who followed George II to London where he established a botanic garden. But in 1736, the *Preface* speaks of 'nobilissimi viri,' and M. Mettrier's manuscript of 'quelques amis de Berne.' Fortunately the identity of these companions is known from an extract of the Diary of Friedrich Sinner, subsequently *Avoyer* of Berne:⁶

'Anno 1736 machte ich eine Bergreis über Interlaken nach Lauterbrunnen und Grindelwald, von da über Scheidegg nach Oberhasle mit Hrn. Obristlt. und nachmaligem Konsul Tillier, Hrn. v. Diesbach, hernach Deutschquästor, Hrn. Haller von Roche, H. Gatschet von Grandson und Hrn. v. Muralt nun Deutschseckelmeister.'

The number and identity of Haller's companions therefore show that M. Mettrier's manuscript cannot refer to 1732 but agrees with all that is known of the tour of 1736.

Finally, there is a conclusive piece of evidence concerning the mine of rock-crystal on the Zinkenstock, near the Grimsel. In a footnote to line 403 of his poem 'Die Alpen' published in the edition of 1773,

^{5a} 'Albrecht von Hallers Briefe an Johannes Gesner 1728-1777,' herausgegeben von H. E. Sigerist. *Abhandlungen der königlichen Gesellschaft der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen*, Math.-Phys. Klasse, N.F., Bd. XI, 2. Berlin, 1923.

⁶ In H. Dübi: 'Der Alpensinn,' *Neujahrsblatt der Litterarischen Gesellschaft Bern auf das Jahr* 1902, Bern, 1901.

Haller wrote :⁷ ' Die Kurz vorher entdeckten Krystallen habe ich A. 1728 und 1732 gesehen und A. 1736 bin ich bey den wirklichen Gruben gewesen.' M. Mettrier's manuscript describes a visit to the mine on the Zinkenstock and must therefore refer to the tour of 1736.

Since this manuscript bears the title 'Troisième relation d'un voyage fait sur les Alpes,' and the tours of 1728 and 1731 were described in detailed accounts, it follows that there was no detailed account of the tour of 1732.

Some additional information is, however, available about the tour of 1732. In the *Preface* of 1768 there is no mention of Lauterbrunnen in the entry for 1732, but it is known that he went there in that year from a footnote to line 360 of his poem 'Die Alpen' which refers to waterfalls :⁸ 'Eigentlich ist hier die Rede vom Staubbach in Lauterbrunnen, den ich auch A. 1732, 1736, und 1756 besehen habe, wiewohl der Wasserfall [Pissevache] bei Martinach (1728, 33, und 57), der Reichenbach (1732, 1736), . . .' While it is clear that Haller went to Lauterbrunnen in 1732, his memory was at fault in thinking that line 360 of his poem was inspired by the Staubbach, because, as Vetter⁹ has shown, it was written before 1732 and Haller did not see Lauterbrunnen before that year.

It is more difficult to determine whether Haller went as far as the Grimsel in 1732 before turning back, deterred by the civil commotion in the Valais. He specified in the footnote quoted above that he saw crystals from the Zinkenstock mine in 1728 and 1732, and in the account of his 1728 journey he said that he saw them in Herr Frisching's house at Meiringen. It is probable that it was there that he saw them in 1732, and that he did not go to the Grimsel in that year. The manuscript of 1736 published by M. Mettrier therefore contains the account of Haller's first visit to the Grimsel.

Haller made two other references to his having seen the crystals from the Zinkenstock, which have given rise to confusion. One is on p. v of his *Preface* of 1768 : 'Ad Arolae ex valle ferissima, versus Hospitium Grimsulae properantis, ripas circa annum 1727 maximae glebae centenarum, ducentenarum, etiam plurium librarum e fossae sunt, quas annis 1728 & 1733 cominus vidi.' The other is in a footnote to line 403 of his poem 'Die Alpen' as printed in earlier editions of his works : 'Ich habe selbst das grösste, das damals noch gegraben worden war, a. 1733 auf den Alpen betrachtet. Es war 695 Pfund schwer.'

The itinerary of Haller's tour of 1733 is given in his *Preface* of 1768 as follows : 'Anno 1733, per montem *Nessum* (Niesen), in vallem

⁷ *Gedicht von der Schönheit und den Nutzen der Schweizerischen Alpen*, Bern, 1773 : recorded in L. Hirzel : *Hallers Gedichte*, Frauenfeld, 1882, p. 305.

⁸ See reference in footnote 7.

⁹ F. Vetter : 'Der "Staubbach" in Hallers Alpen und der Staubbach der Weltliteratur,' *Festgabe zur LX Jahresversammlung der allgemeinen geschichtsforschenden Gesellschaft dargeboten vom Historischen Verein des Kantons Bern*, 1905.

Frutingensem per Gemmium montem in Vallesiam excurri, ex ea per montanam *Les Mosses* in vallem Simmiam urbem patriam peragravi.' It will be noted that he went nowhere near Meiringen or the Grimsel in that year, and while it is not impossible that he may have seen large pieces of rock-crystal elsewhere, it is most unlikely, because he referred specifically in his *Relation* of 1736 (M. Mettrier's manuscript) to such a piece weighing 'six quintaux' which he saw at Meiringen, 'qui est pourtant si transparente qu'on lit fort bien une gazette à travers.'

It must be concluded therefore that the references to his having seen the crystals in 1733 are misprints for 1732, and this is confirmed by the fact that in the later edition of his works, in 1773, the footnote to line 403 of 'Die Alpen' (quoted above) gives 1732 and not 1733.

In his article on 'Haller und die Alpen,'¹⁰ the late Dr. Heinrich Dübi drew attention to a letter addressed to Haller by Jacques-Barthelémy Michéli du Crest, apparently dated 2 August 1755, from which Dübi concluded that Haller had made an otherwise unrecorded visit to the Bernese Oberland in 1755. The relevant passage of the letter in question is as follows, quoted from the transcription by J. H. Graf:¹¹

'Arbourg 2 Aoust 1725 [*sic*].

'Monsieur

'Vous croiant accablé de goutte, j'ai été bien agréablement surpris par l'honneur de la vôtre du 31 juillet, de voir que non seulement vous jouissez d'une bonne santé, mais encore que vous étiez de retour du voiage que vous méditez l'année précédante auprès des Gletscher de l'Oberland pour les reconnoître . . .'

The date printed at the head of Graf's transcription of this letter is obviously a misprint, but it occurred to me to wonder if it might not also cover a correction, which would be called for if this letter were misplaced in the series. In order to check this possibility, I examined the text of this letter and that of others of 1755 and 1756. In the letter in question, Michéli du Crest refers to a mention of thermometers which he made in his immediately preceding letter. There is no mention of thermometers in his letter of 19 juillet 1755; but there is much talk of thermometers in his letter of 21 juin 1756. It must therefore be concluded that the correct date of the letter in question was 2 aoust 1756, and no visit by Haller to the Bernese Oberland in 1755 arises at all. Indeed, in view of Haller's own statement in the Introduction to Wagner's illustrations of the Alps, no other conclusion is possible. Speaking of his visit to Lauterbrunnen in 1756 he wrote:¹² 'Il y avoit vingt ans que je n'avois voyagé dans les Alpes.' By drawing attention to this long interval of time since he had visited a region

¹⁰ H. Dubi: 'Haller und die Alpen,' *Neues Berner Taschenbuch für das Jahr 1909*, Bern, 1908.

¹¹ *Geschichte der Mathematik und der Naturwissenschaften in Bernischen Landen*, 3, (2), Bern, 1890.

¹² *Vues remarquables des montagnes de la Suisse*, Berne, 1778.

which meant so much to him, Haller could not have been there in the preceding year.

This is in complete agreement with the entries in Haller's *Preface* of 1768. For the years in question they are as follows: 'Anno 1755 paludosa *Biennensia* & *Moratensia* petii, inde in villa *Method* [near Yverdon] rusticatione facta in vallem Juratensem [de Joux] ejusque Montes *la Dent* [de *Vaulion*] & *Montendre* adscendi.' No Alps or Bernese Oberland in 1755, therefore. And in the following year: 'Anno 1756 . . . Eodem anno vallem *Lauterbrunn*; ad ultimas usque glaciales rupes *Steinenberg* invisi, . . .' Haller also described how, shortly after his excursion, an avalanche of ice came down across the path which he had trod. That he saw the *Staubbach* in 1756 was also mentioned in a footnote quoted above.

Finally it may be noted that *Michéli du Crest's* letter of 2 August 1756 refers to Haller's intention of visiting the Bernese Oberland during the preceding year. This also is confirmed in a letter from Haller to *Abraham Gagnebin* dated 14 January 1755, the relevant passage in which is as follows: ¹³ ' . . . Pour moi, j'ai formé le dessein de visiter encore une fois le *Grimsel* et de pousser jusqu'au *Zinkengletscher* . . .' Haller's eagerness to revisit the favourite scenes of his youth can be well understood, for he had but shortly before returned to Berne from his professorship at *Göttingen* which had kept him away from the Alps for twenty years. As has been shown, Haller's intention had to wait one more year before it was realised.

This is of some importance because *Michéli du Crest*,¹⁴ drawing his panorama of the Alps as seen from his prison in the fortress at *Aarbourg*, depended on Haller for the identification of the different peaks. Some of the information which Haller had given him in 1754 was incorrect, and as *Michéli's* panorama was published in 1755, it appeared with some errors. This was one of the reasons why Haller was so eager to revisit the Bernese Oberland.

I trust that the evidence here brought forward will be sufficient to prove that the manuscript published by *M. Mettrier* refers to 1736, and that Haller did not visit the Bernese Oberland in 1755.

¹³ *H. Brandt*: 'Lettres inédites adressées à *Abraham Gagnebin*,' *Actes de la Société Jurassienne d'Emulation*, Année 1931, la Chaux de Fonds, 1932.

¹⁴ *Prospect géométrique des Montagnes neigeées, dites Gletscher, telles qu'on les découvre en tems favorable, depuis le Château d'Arbourg, dans les territoires des Grisons, du Canton d'Ury et de l'Oberland du Canton de Berne*, Augsbourg, 1755.