



by Ir. Chin Mee Poon

In the Shadow of the Matterhorn

IN August 2011, my wife and I spent 10 days trekking in the Swiss Alps. There were six other Malaysians in the group. We started from Chamonix, a famous French ski resort at the foot of Mont Blanc, the highest peak of the Alps. We would normally start our daily trek from a valley, where we would scale a mountain slope to reach a pass, and then descend into the next valley to put up for the night in a guest house located in a quaint little village, while enjoying the spectacular scenery on the way.

Trekking in the Alps was an exhilarating experience. The villages nestling in the valleys that we were fortunate enough to visit are actually connected to one another by vehicular roads. Thus, one can quite easily visit all of them by car and still have a good time enjoying the mountain views from ground level. However, we had chosen to trek over the mountains to have a better appreciation of the beauty of the Swiss Alps from different angles.

On the ninth day of our trekking, we reached Zermatt around noon. Zermatt is a very charming town located at the foot of the Matterhorn and by far, it is the most famous one amongst the Alpine peaks. Its shape is easily recognisable as most people would have seen an image of it somewhere.

I first got to know the Matterhorn from a cigarette box when I was still a young boy, but that cigarette brand was no longer in the market.

The common name of this 4,478m high peak actually comes from two German words, *Matte*, which means “meadow”, and *Horn*, which implies “peak”. The Matterhorn’s Italian name is Monte Cervino and its French name, Mont Cervin. The Matterhorn was one of the last great Alpine peaks to be scaled and its first ascent in 1865 marked the end of the golden age of alpinism.

Some of us trekked in the shadow of the Matterhorn on the last day of our trek. We had a fantastic view of the Matterhorn as we moved along the mountainside separated from the peak by a river valley.

Zermatt is a famous resort town for mountaineering and skiing. Its permanent population of about 5,800 people may be outnumbered several folds by tourists during the peak seasons. Nevertheless, the many beautifully-decorated buildings lining its main street make the place very pleasurable to stroll in. Zermatt is also the western terminus for the *Glacier Express* rail service connecting St. Moritz to the Matterhorn – Gotthard Bahn (MGB), one of the 8 scenic train routes in Switzerland. ■

