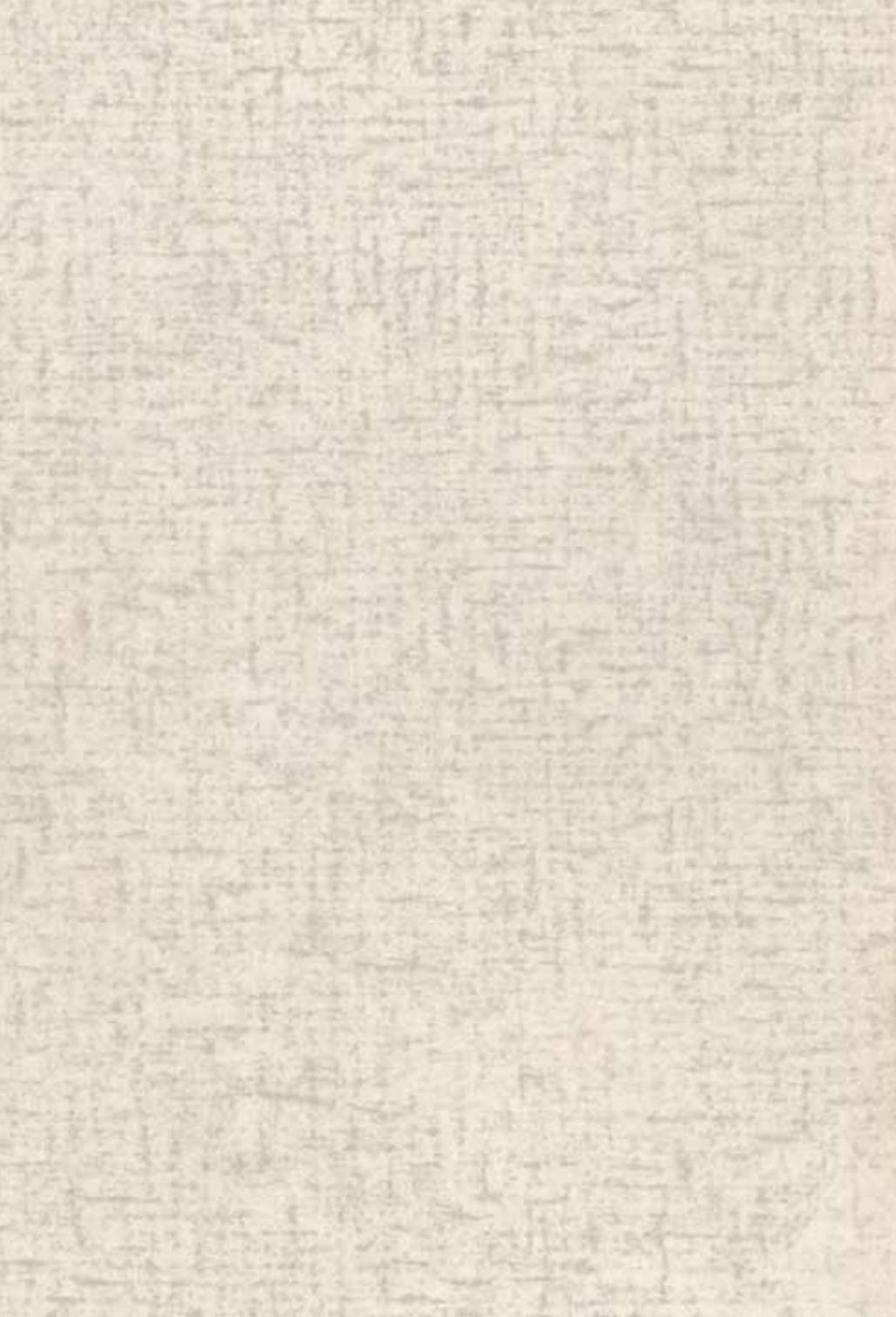


**BY CAR ON
HARDANGERJØKELEN**



HALVDAN HYDLE

**BY CAR ON
HARDANGERJØKELEN**

AN EASTER TRIP
TO THE MOUNTAIN WITH CITRÖEN
HALFTRACK

AUTOMOBILES CITRÖEN
OSLO, STOCKOHLM, KJØBENHAVN
1929

Translated by Per Nielsen
Krybebånd's Societetet
2011

Lis & C a.s Bogtrykkeri
Oslo

<http://kegresse.dk>

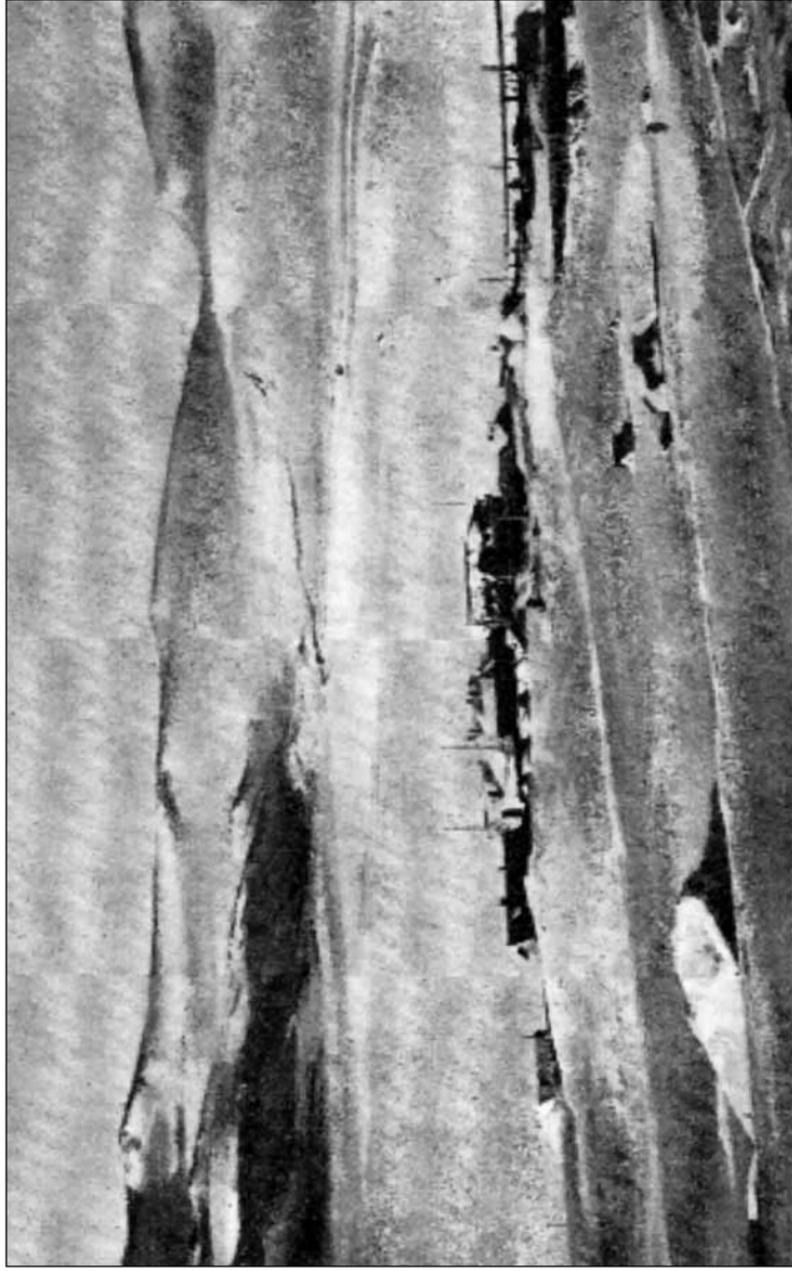
It is not likely that there will be many descendants of the horses in Oslo. They are getting fewer by the minute. But if there were, they would likely remember an evil and dangerous animal that one cold march morning came creeping a cross Pilestrædet. It looked in many ways like the enemy, the car, but instead of puffing along on rubber feet, it crawled on hundreds of small caterpillar feet. The dull fish eyes glowed with evil in the dark and the sound had some in common with the annoying sound of cars, which the soft ears of horses dislike.

This is just about how this halftrack expedition must have appeared in the eye of a horse. It was rather an early morning, and as you might know, at this hour the town horses are especially alert. The beautiful animal that pulls the wagon to its destination, which has already seen a bit, must have starred with anxiety after the mechanical caterpillar as it disappeared down the street. From a horse point of view it appears pointless that the wagon should move by itself. Just like we people would wonder if we saw a pair of pants walking down Karl Johan.

A halftrack is on the other hand not so different than any other car. It just represents a car in an earlier stage of evolution, a car that does not even have the need of roads, just the plain dirt. It is built on the same principles of the large tanks for warfare, which spread terror on the plains of Flanders. And on the same way the birds wing have been a model for the airplane wing, the caterpillar have been inspiration to crawl when there is something to crawl on.

In the Invalid Hotel in Paris, which houses so many holy items, is a small car. You wonder why it's here among the cannons from Leipzig, Waterloo and Sedan, which shot them into a place in world history and the railway car where Foch and Erzberger meet one morning in the Argonne Forest to decide the fate of people in the early period. It is Citroëns Halftrack, the strange car that took the liberty to crawl across Sahara's dessert despite the doubt and ill warnings from wise men.

It is tempting to dwell a moment by the name André Citroën, the French lieutenant from Marne that made grenades for the last front, and ended up proving that American large scale industry can be adopted to European soil. Perhaps the war made him; it did teach him the right combination



Harandengerjøkelen

of speed and precision. As by magic he made the large ammunition factories of Paris deliver to the army in just few weeks. This was a turning point for the victory of France. But even more spectacular, he changed the output of these factories to civilian products, when peace came to the world. Now most people are forgetting the Lieutenant the grenade man André Citroën, while millions are forced to place attention by the car man by the same name.

Nobody believed that the Citroën Sahara car could do the task it was made for. Not only did it succeed. It did it with honor. It was a variant of the Sahara car, made especially for snows, which were to force the height mountain of Norway in the winter storm. The fact that this expedition was looked upon with skepticism just made it more tempting for us to do, as we rolled down Pilestrædet this cold march morning.

The scope of the expedition is soon told and the participants soon presented. The plan was to travel through the Valdres across Filefjell to Maristuen, the over the Hemsedalsfjelle, down to Hallingdal and via Dagli to Kongsberg and the return to Oslo. This tour would take 6 days and should tell about the Kegress ability to handle transport of people and mail in the mountain country during winter



On the hill near Fagernes

when all roads are well below the snow.

The leader of the expedition was the Citroën factories Norwegian inspector, first Lieutenant Vethe. The participants counted director of post Helsing, tradesman Burmeister, Board director of A/S French Auto import and finally Costa. If the presentation of the last person seems short, here is a little more information. Henry Costa. He build the first one cylinder motorcar and have since used most his life bent over an engine compartment or behind a wheel. He used to be one of the best drivers of France and is now a Norwegian. He taught our king to drive a car and older drivers in Oslo owe him their knowledge of the wonderful me-

chanics of motors. Between these events are of course a number of other events which he gladly talks about on his poor Norwegian.

We frightened the horses in Homansbyen and gained quite a few surprised looks, even from the part of Oslo where people try to convince the tax department those cars is not luxury, but a simple necessity. We enjoyed this curiosity of the people we passed though the fine snow in Normarken and through the plowing fields of Hadeland. At times the mimic of the faces was a "Talma" worthy. We also meet the usual stare of what any car deserves and passed a person with round eyes and a mouth that slowly opened, as he saw the strange bands that pulled us forward.

Perhaps this is the time to tell a bit about the reason for the unusual stare we received. A half track is as mentioned almost like other cars. It travels on wheels and front wheels are like any other set of wheels.

The halftrack is constructed by M. Kegresse who has worked on snowmobiles the last 20 years. He is born Russian but has worked for many years at the Citroën factories. (*Ed.: this is not correct*).

Our Kegresse car is especially build for winter. Below the front wheels is a set of wide steel skies.



On Filefjel

The skies are $\frac{1}{2}$ a foot above the ground when the front wheels rolls. On the side of the skies a set of steel knives in hard steel is mounted. These can be lowered when the car travels on surfaces with ice where the skies otherwise would have no grip. The surprise is in the back. Here a set of wide belts are mounted and driven by the engine. The belt has toots that get in grip with a gear wheel on each side. The side view of the belt system is similar to the system of a locomotive for the high mountain. And it is in fact on the high mountain the Kegresse is put to the test.

A ride in this car on a stony road would seem an unpleasant experience with all those aluminum

plates mounted on the belt. But on the contrary a row of rubber blocks mounted on top of each aluminum plate give an almost noiseless travel across the stone bridge; and on the road the car skipped every hole in the surface. We did not experience the normal jumps where you are thrown to a painful contact with the roof that is normal even in luxurious cars.

At Brandbu we had a short debate whether to take the gravel road or travel over the ice the 4 miles to Odnes. Even when we saw several timber tows on the ice, we continued on the road. Our loaded halftrack weighed about 3 tones and according to the locals, the ice can be unsafe with a heavy load.

At Etna, where the road passes the tree line and over the hills towards Valdres, the halftrack finally was in its right element. Here the road was hidden under the snow. The Forrest was like spring quite green, but on the road it was still winter.

This is what we had hoped for. The small sharp feet moving endlessly, and slowly pulling the heavy body over the deep snow of Tonsåsen, while Costa worked hard at the steering wheel. Now the steering was heavy due to the steel skies deep in the wet spring snow. The car did well, but slowly. It was night when we moved downwards towards



Arrival at Nystuen

Aurdal and on to Faurnes where Lage Fosheim was standing on the concrete stairs of Valdres watching the car as it moved in his yard.

The Director of Mail telegraphed that he would arrive to Fagernes by train at noon the next day. It would give us time to prepare the trip over the next mountain. Costas saw a hop for skiers. He resisted trying it with skies, but took the car up the slope. On the place on the slope the locals call "kuln"; Costas made the car walk on two legs. He slid down with snow scattering around the belts.

After this rehearsal we got the Director of Mail on board and continued through the valley. The road changes from sand and mud to snow. The wa-

ter has washed away part of the road. Other places the snow has made narrow passes. The tracks were busy and we made it to Øylo on schedule.

Up in Valdres the wind blew unkindly and we took shelter in a house. The time we should have spend sleeping we listened to the wind rattling the windows. When it finally went quiet, the local police authority Opdal called.

“You cannot go to the mountain today”.

We thought of trying anyhow!

There was a major difference between Opdal and the expedition leader, of the capabilities of the car. We started right after and meet the head shaking Opdal later up close to Vinstra.

The trip via Vangsmjøsen was like any other car travel. There was open water and glitter of rainbow over the coastline. First at Skogstad, where the road gets steep, we meet the snow.

A hard snow blew and the pleasure of riding an open car was mixed, even though we wore inch thick coats. The engine worked well and the tracks took us though the endless white. But the passengers just had to sit.

Here Grosser Burmeister got the brilliant idea of towing skiers. He had a long tow with him. The long tow made it possible to keep distance to



Departure from Maristuen

the car and avoid the exhaust fumes of the motor working at high pressure. This is how two of us got the experience of skiing over Filefjell in a line after a car. Burmeister and I both had the experience of falling head first, when the animal up front, threw us off track. We arrived Nystuen in god shape and created quite a sensation in the lonely mountain cabin. The Easter guests were inside drinking "polter" and playing solitaire and they were quite surprised. "We can't go skiing and then a car comes!"

The reception was grandiose, even the landlord found his way out. If this was not the occasion for the only bottle of Champaign, it never came. We tried to protest, but failed. This bottle will sizzle in

our minds forever, in memory of this event.

The wind and the snow gave us a hard struggle. Wind gusts with hail were thrown at us. The ground changed between ice and new snow. The engine seemed to perform better than the people in the car and on the tow behind the car.

It seemed that the rumor of our arrival was faster than us getting to Maristuen. Many curious were waiting, as we expected. The authorities lead engineer Knudsen from the road administration, head of the communication committee and the local police were sure the car would not make it up the mountain, until Costas drove up in front of the hotel building.

We had a party that night in Maristuen. And it was not only the western hospitality in the competent hands of the host madam Sara that made the evening unforgettable. A car traveling the mountain at winter is quite an accomplishment.

Quite a few participated in the party and perhaps this first trip across the mountain in winter made them realize that the rest of the world came closer. This part of Norway has so far been isolated most of the year. And if it is true that the landscape forms the mind of the inhabitants, this might be the end of the narrow-mindedness that grows when winter

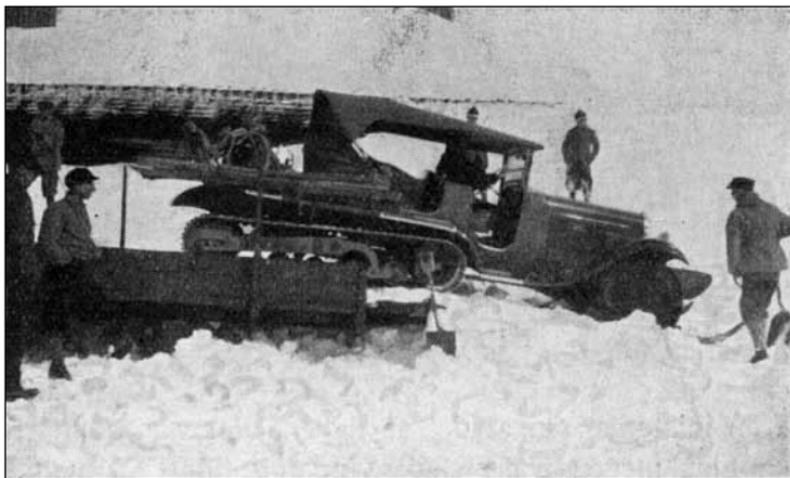


At 1200 meter

storms put an end to travel. This refection is unavoidable. Also; this motor may finally realize the thoughts of Håkon Håkonsøns of "one country and one people" and concur the mountain that separates the two. Anyhow, this evening at Maristuen was joyful and friendly to us travelers that took the trip contrary to the predictions. "C'est drôle" said Costa when he ended the days match with Filefjell.

Yes, this was indeed fun and at the same time understandable. The Vest Land has been a closed part of the country and the best men have been at the Kings counseling table to present plans to open it. Plans, prospects and calculations have piled up in the council archives.

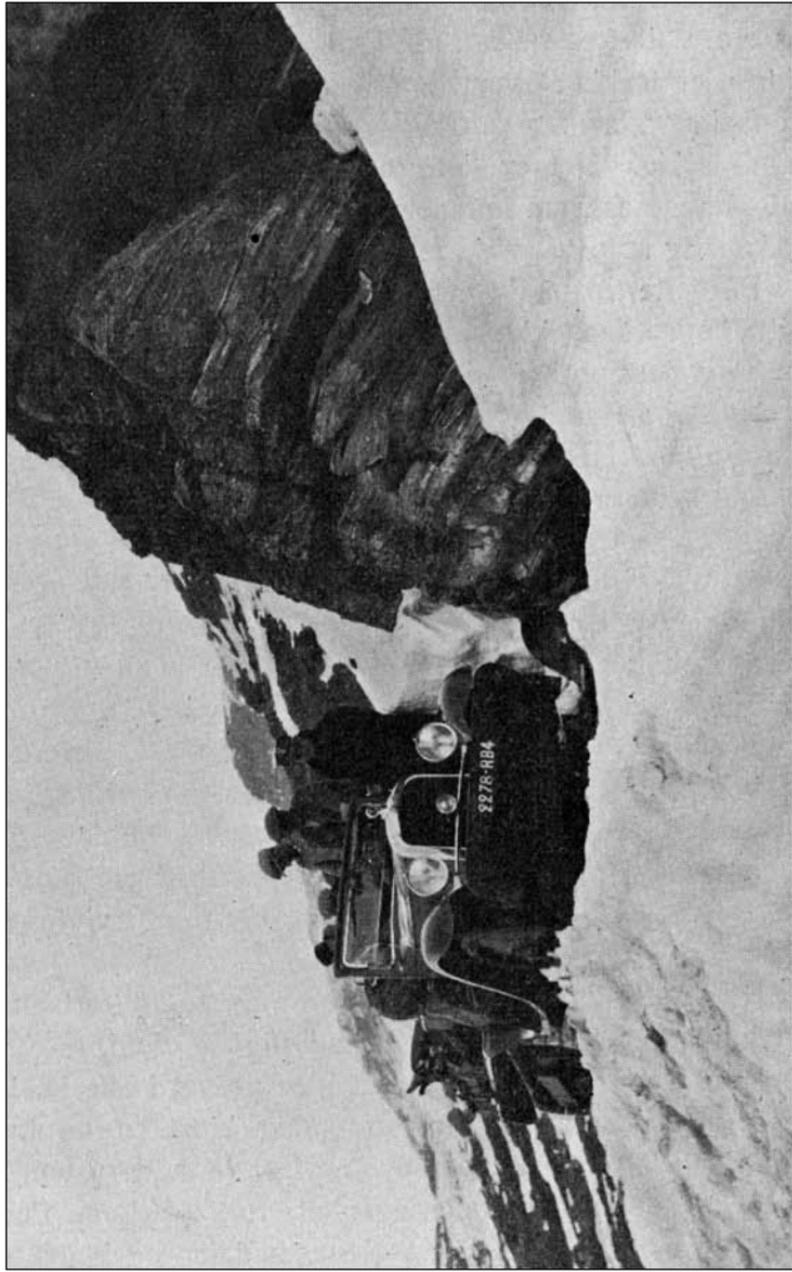
Railways are often repeated in these plans. But railways are no longer what it used to be. The steel wheels on rails are not the only answer to beat of the century. Coal and steel have been distended



The train station at Finse

by petrol and the green flash from the sparkplugs. No one will probably change "Stambanerne" (Ed.: the local rails) but all the connections to tie the new parts of the country together do not have to be railroads. Flåmdaldbanen is example of how bad this can be done.

While the politicians of the Western part of the country have worked with the budgets for rail, closedown of small railway companies and despair in the big ones is a reality. The route the belt driven cars went was drawn in red on maps with properly by now is just getting mere yellow in some government archive. The plan is still a railway from Lærdal to Fagernes if we just had the millions it



Difficult passage at Breitstølen

took to establish it.

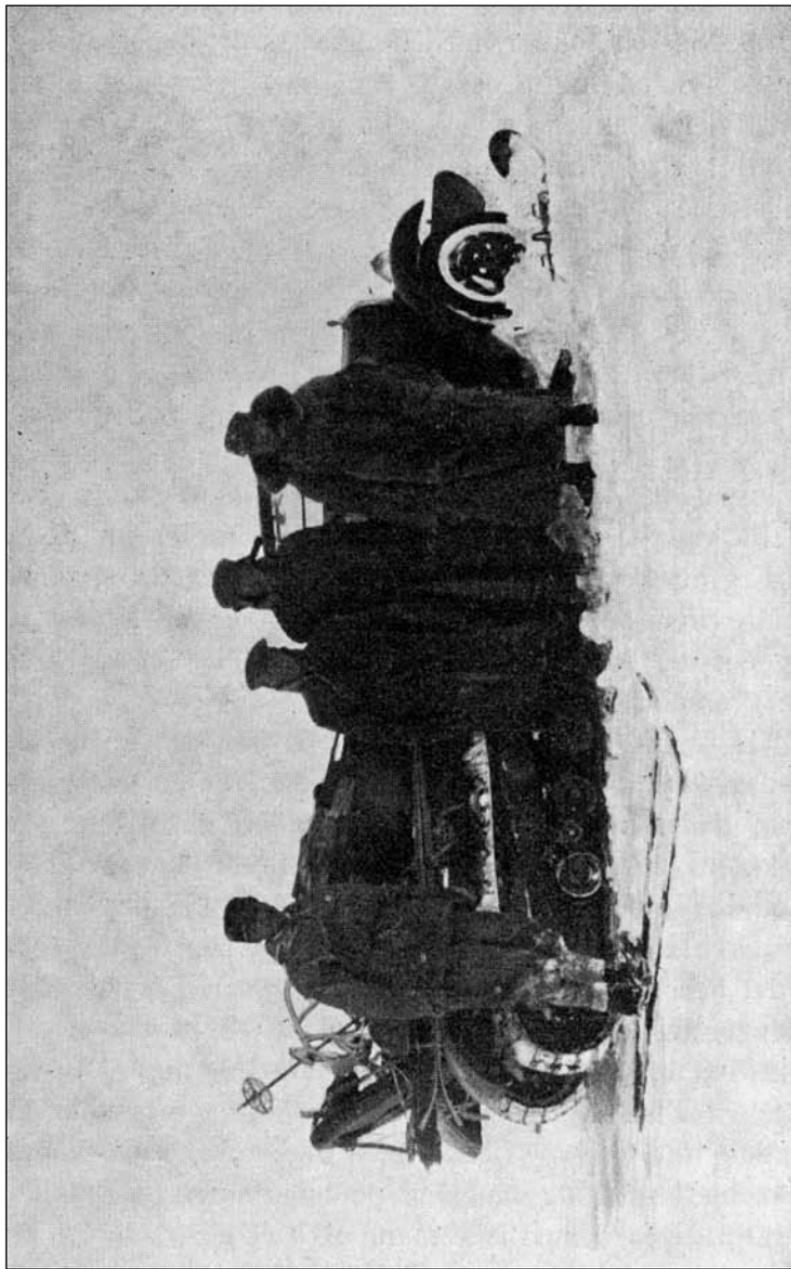
Right at that moment I doubt my estimate and ask lieutenant Vethe, who is talking to Mrs. Maristuen on the same subject. "Can you replace the railway Lærdal-Fagernæs with your belt driven vehicles?"

"No" he replies. He needs more time during winter compared to the railway. Our trip over the mountain didn't go fast; we had to brake in a new trail. When you can run in old trails, you can do it faster. A railway Lærdal-Fagernæs will cost millions. Give me 50 thousands to establish the belt car service and 6-8 thousands to cover the annual expense, and I will make a daily person and post traffic over the mountain with three vehicals.

Here Lieutenant Vehte leaves me, to continue his lecture on the zoology of the belt animal.

The next day the car was tested in skier terrain on different slopes. It was even taken on a tour back to Nystuen to convince the head shaking wise men of its superiority.

Next morning we went through the valley and before noon we moved up towards Hemsefjellene. The track shifted endlessly between drifts with blue hard ice and dunes of soft new snow. The sun followed us to Breistølen, and disappeared as we continued through the plain.



On the way to Hardangerjøklen
(Burmeister, Costa, Thor Larsen, Vethe).

Hemsedalsfjellene proved to be the most serious challenge. We went up in a 30 degree angle on green ice with the snowstorm directly in the face. A belt driven car is after all a car with the same 6 cylinder engine as other Citroën, even if it has a reduction gear. The car can not go up a solid wall and only to a certain degree go tilted one side. Sometimes we had to carve the holds in the ice. It was night before we finally came down to the highest of the houses in Hemsedal.

Here we found the road again, but it was a sad mix of snow and mud. Despite Vethes steel fists on the wheel, we were thrown from side to side as if he was drunk. None of us were really clear on how we reached Gol that night.

The director of post left us the following day. The hunter and sportsman were not tired, but the director's chair needed to be filled, back in Oslo. The sympatric man was cheered as he left with the Bergen train.

From Geilo we got report on new snow. The route over Dagali was not for our car. Much of the roads were gone and the streams were deep. Lieutenant Vehte therefore decided to go up to Finse and from there attack Hadangerjøkelen. Here there would be snow.



Maristuen

Helpful people from the railroad got the car on the train to the little town up the mountain. The seat of the director of post was taken during the day of Thor Larsen employed by the road maintenance office. He happened to be in Haugastøl just as the freight train, with the belt car, passed and 5 minutes later he had the vacant seat. A trip on Jøklen with car could not be resisted by the energetic road engineer.

At Finse the railroad car was driven into a drift and a provosoric ramp was made in snow so the belt driven car could crawl into its right element. Quickly we mounted the "ice knives", a sharp steel element that was fastened with screws to every

9.th belt segment to improve performance in loose snow. Precisely at 12 we were ready for start at the memorial stone raised for Robert Scott.

Here at 1100 meter the sun was shining and the Easter life was flourishing. But further up the mountain the wind was playing with the snow. The same snow that once took the life of this wonderful Englishman who's lonely memorial is placed here on Villfjellet in Norway.

Hadangerjøklelen have tied a white band of snow around our hats and laid the ever white drifts over the landscape. The Belt Car is ready, with all hundreds of feet anxious for takeoff in the hard snow and the engine spinning and ready for the fight. Then we cut our way over the white plain of Finsevannets with a tail of Easter guests on tow. The motor hums and sings while the thermometer on the radiator slowly rises and small gusts of vapor escape the radiator cap. The engine pulls the vehicle up the gletcher but it is also man conquering nature. The snow must surrender to the fine precision pistons. The wonderful combination of oil, petrol and metals.

Hadangerjøklen wouldn't let us go the easy way. The old mountain was in a bad mood. He felt the small animal that crept upwards with small sharp



Nystuen

feet. And now he sneezes so the snow packs around us swirling white. The slope gets steeper and the belts are full of snow. The engine works madly as the bands slowly digs in the snow.

We are exactly at the same place where the first Kegresse car had to retire after tree days of fierce struggle against the gletcher. This was years ago. Slowly we realize that we, despite the improved Kegresse, also have to give up. The freezing and snowstorm in the face give us strong argument to return.

Costa has almost worn his arms off in the lead heavy track and Vethe takes the wheel. He either

has better understanding of the snow or is lucky to find the right track up mountain, and after a little more than an hour Hardangerjøklen is concurred.

It was unfortunate not modesty that kept us from celebrating the historic moment. The snow storm up on the white dessert plateau was so fierce that we only thought about getting down again.

Anyhow, the event was celebrated after we slid back down hill to Finse. The expedition was dissolved formally over a glass of Champaign. We ended this little out of the ordinary Easter trip, with firm handshakes, as men.

Halfdan Hylde.

BELTEBILEN OG TURIST- TRAFIKKEN

Efter hvad de seneste opgaver vet å fortelle, skal turisttrafikken og reiselivet i Norge kaste av sig henimot 20 millioner kroner om året. De penger turistene legger igjen betyr med andre ord allerede nu en inntektskilde av såpass dimensjoner, at den har krav på den aller største oppmerksomhet, ikke bare fra myndighetenes side, men også fra dem hvis interessefære turistvesenet i en eller annen form tangerer.

Vi er alle klar over at dette tall bør økes og også kan økes i betraktelig grad. Vi ser f. eks. at et land som Schweitz, hvis betingelser som turiststrøk stort sett ikke er bedre enn Norges, formår å bringe 15—20 ganger så meget ut av sin turisttrafikk. Schweitzerne er imidlertid ikke kommet sovende til dette resultat, der ligger et målbevisst arbeide, en omfattende publisitet, en serie av omhyggelig planlagte bestrebelses på å bringe forholdene i overensstemmelse med de reisendes ønsker og vaner, bak dette smukke og imponerende tall.

Der består et avgjort misforhold mellom disse to Europas mest berømte fjelland, hvad angår å ha nyt-

tiggjort sig de herligheter som naturen har irettelagt. Misforholdet vilde ikke ha vært så stort, hvis myndighetene herhjemme hadde vært litt mindre innstillet på å la tingene skjøtte sig selv, hvis der var ofret litt mer på publisiteten, på Norgesreklamen i utlandet, og vi ellers på dette felt forstod å arbeide sammen like godt som vi ellers forstår å motarbeide hverandre.

Vi har visstnok mange vanskeligheter å kjempe med. Som følge av landets ugjestmilde klima har vår virkelige turistsesong vesentlig innskrenket sig til nogen korte sommermåned, og en enkelt påskeuke i vinterhalvåret. Det er *fjellet* de fleste utlendinger — og også storparten av landets egne turister, søker til, og utenom de nevnte tider kan vi vanskelig by dem til å vandre i våre fjell, slik som forholdene nu engang er. For hvis vi for alvor vil trekke den store, brede turiststrøm op på våre vidder, så må vi også kunne by dem de samme vilkår, den samme komfort som de ellers er vant til — eller venter å finne. Og som forholdene er idag, da en utenlandsk turist forlanger full «service» enten han befinner sig ved sjøen eller i 2 tusen meters høide, så må f. eks. mange av våre prektige høifjellshoteller gi tapt overfor dette behov, og tvinges til å holde stengt store deler av året.

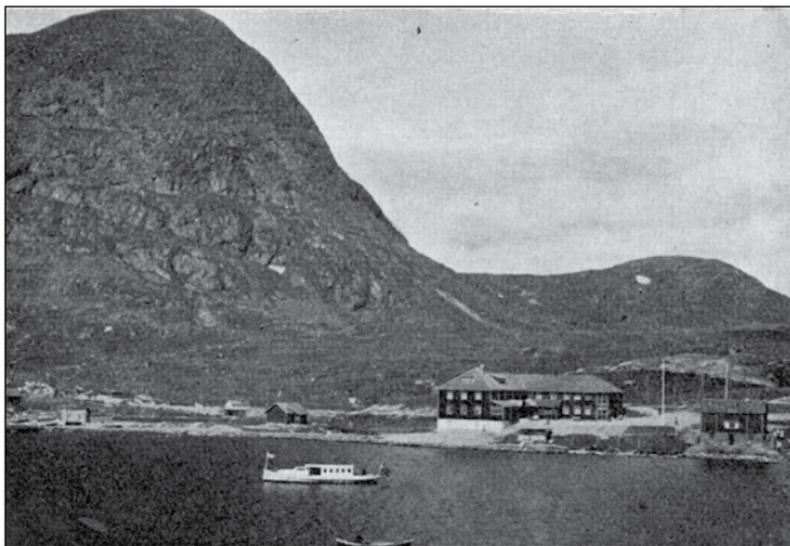
Det er særlig transportspørsmålet som i dette stykke skaper vanskeligheter i vårt land. Vi er landet med de svære avstander, den lange vinter og de store snemengder. Kommunikasjoner er tidens løsen. Veier, baner, transportlinjer, i det hele tatt fremkomst og fart er hvad alle nasjoner for tiden arbeider med. Men for oss betyr dette en ekstra vanskelighet, takket være vår lange vinter og vår dype sne. Som forholdene stiller



Gjendesheim

sig idag, må vi mange steder erklære oss handicapet av det besvær som sneen og vinteren byr oss. Vi har prektige veier, like inn i høifjellstrakten, men som vi kun kan benytte en snau halvpart av året, fordi snebrøitingen ellers byr så altfor store vanskeligheter. Og særlig blir denne landets ugunstige stilling åpenbar, når vi ser på den nyss nevnte konkurransen: Norge som turistland.

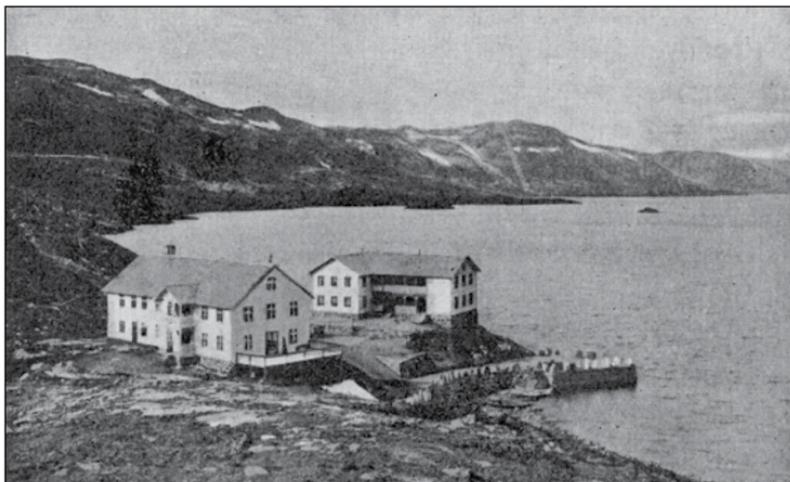
Vi eier f. eks. Europas mest praktfulle fjellregion, Jotunheimen. Det er overholdet ikke så mange av vår klodes fjellegner, som kan opvise en slik uavladelig vekslning av nutenes ville, forrevne majestet, og viddenes og sommersneens forunderlige melankoli. I nogen korte sommermåneder kan Jotunheimen henrykke et internasjonalt publikum, men den største del av året, da heimen er enn villere og skjønnere enn ellers, da ligger den lukket og låst. Veiene er gjemt under hårde, hvite,



Bygdin

skinnende flater, hotellene er stengt, eventyrriket er kun tilgjengelig for den trenede skiløper, — med renskinnssposen på ryggen. Og utenlandske turister kan som bekjent ikke gå på ski.

Her er det *beltebilen* kan formå å bringe en endring i forholdene. En beltebil forlanger ikke banede veier, den går like lett over vidden i sne. Den forsøksekspedisjon som blev foretatt med Citroëns beltebil i påsken i år, viste til fulle at vognen kan ta sig frem, likegyldig omtrent hvordan været og føret er. Det er ikke tvil om, at de mange store hoteller, som kranser høifjellet i det sydlige Norge, ved beltebilers hjelp kunde skape sig en sesong så å si året rundt. Beltebilen overtar med letthet all den trafikk som de ordinære biler formidler ved sommertid, men som automatisk stanser i det øieblikk sneen setter inn.



Tyin

— La oss kaste ett blick på nogen av de mange prektige turiststasjoner i fjellet, som i forholdenes medfør nu er henvist til å holde stengt den største del av året. Vi har f. eks. Bygdin Høifjellshotell, et tipp topp moderne anlegg, med en beliggenhet som man kan lete efter i mange kongeriker. Det ligger like i inngangen til Jotunheimen, det er et ønskested for folk som elsker fjellet, for jegeren som har rypelyngen like utfor stuedøren, for sportsfiskeren som har masser av gul, fet fjellørret å leke med i elveosen.

Men først i slutten av juni, når det er høisommer i sydligere land, er Bygdin i stand til å åpne. Og i slutten av september stenger atter sneen den deilige lille oase inne mellem Jotunheimens fjell. Ellers er det kun en uke i påsken at eventyret er tilgjengelig, og da som regel bare for landets egne barn.

Det er sneen som er skyld i det hele. I sesongen er adkomsten mer enn lett, tog fra Oslo til Fagernes i

Valdres, derfra en prektig biltur oppgjennom Østre Slidre, over fjellet og frem til Bygdin. Men om vinteren makter man ikke å holde oppe den siste halvpart av veien. Det vilde bety et umenneskelig, et uoverkommelig slit å holde ryddet vei over vidden, fra Skammestein og frem til den kjente turiststasjon. En beltebil derimot vilde klare brasene, den vilde krabbe over fjellet, uanfektet av sneen, like lett som de almindelige biler forbinder strekningen Fagernes—Bygdin ved sommertid.

På samme måte stiller det sig med en turistrute, som kanskje er likeså yndet, nemlig veien fra Gol i Hallingdal og over fjellet til Tyn. Høst og vinter, og langt ut på våren er veien op gjennom Hemsedal stengt. Ved beltebilens hjelp kunde man lett og sikkert nå frem de 9 mil gjennom de praktfulle fjelltrakter over til Lærdal og derfra op til Maristuen. Stasjoner som Bjøberg og Breistølen vilde derved få en ny og betraktelig attraksjon. Og Maristuen behøvde ikke å innskrenke sig til å vedlikeholde sin berømmelse i de korte sommermånedene alene.

Den motsatte vei, gjennom Valdres og over Filefjell til Sogn, kunde også ved beltebilens hjelp bli en ny og storslagen attraksjon. Som forholdene er idag, holdes ikke veiene oppe lenger enn til Skogstad, mens beltebilen kunde åpne et vinterpanorama av første rang, i traktene vest for Tyn, frem til Nystuen, som har alle betingelser for å kunne bli et Norges Davos, og ned til Maristuen som allerede er velkjent nok.

Det underlige, krabbende dyr som heter beltebilen åpner i det hele tatt muligheter overalt i våre vinter-egner. Fremme ved Gjende og Sjudalsvannene har vi



Mail service in Switzerland

f. eks. også liggende de mest utsøkte turiststasjoner som på grunn av fjellet og sneen er lukket den største del av året. Men fra Sjøa stasjon på Dovrebanen går der vei helt frem til Bessheim og Gjendesheim, den sner ned om vinteren, men beltebilen klarer den allikevel. Beltebilen kunde trekke en helt ny kolleksjon av turister op i disse herlige egner, det er nemlig ikke sneen selv, som holder dem borte, men vanskelighetene ved å komme frem.

Ekseplene kunde forfleres i det uendelige. Ett er i hvert fall sikkert, vi må på letteste, billigste og bekvemmeste måte trekke turistene op i våre fjell, hvis vi fortsatt skal hevde oss som turistland. Vi kan ikke invitere utlendingene på strabasiøse skiturer, den slags passer ene og alene for nordmenn, vi må simpelthen frakte dem til stuedøren. Og i det stykke er det beltebilen har sin store misjon. Motoren og larveføttene blir alene om slitet, og de fremmede får vinterfjellets eventyr oplatt for sine øine uten å måtte betale med alle de anstrengelser som *vi kanskje* har måttet venne oss til. Og da vil de sikkert komme igjen —.

