

FOREWORD

Today, the World Heritage List comprises 890 heritage sites. These landscapes and cultural monuments are of such extraordinary and universal value that they have been declared parts of the “World Heritage of Mankind”, therefore enjoying the protection of the international community of states. Up to now, only five railway lines in the world have been awarded this distinction.

That railway lines have at all found their way into the world heritage is due to an initiative of the landscape protection organization “Alliance for Nature” in Vienna. When, in the 1990ies plans for a base tunnel under the Semmering were initiated, which would mean replacing the railway line across the Semmering, Alliance for Nature started their initiative “World Cultural Heritage Semmering Railway”. At that time there was not a single railway line worldwide having the status of a World Heritage. Therefore, renowned experts from different parts of the world had to be commissioned with the compilation of a comparative study to which Alliance for Nature made substantial contributions. The experts finally reached the conclusion that the Semmering Railway Line indeed was one of the greatest technical achievements of humanity and could therefore rank alongside with the lagoon city of Venice, the birthplace of Carl Ritter von Ghega, the Indian tomb Taj Mahal, the Egyptian Pyramids, but also the big national parks in North America and Africa.

It was foremost the pioneer work achieved during the construction of the railway line across the Semmering and the quality of the buildings that allow up to our days the main railway traffic on this line made the UNESCO World Heritage Committee decide unanimously to include the Semmering Railway Line into the World Heritage List. But also the magnificent mountain landscape with its natural beauty and the cultural landscape with its numerous villas and hotels that has been created in the wake of the railway construction led to granting the railway line and its surrounding landscape the protection of the international community of states. Without the dedication of the author of this book, Mr. Christian Schuhböck, Secretary General of Alliance for Nature – for more than two decades active in the spirit of the World Heritage Convention – there would not be a “World Cultural Heritage Semmering Railway” today.

Consequently, the successful nationally and internationally honored initiative “World Cultural Heritage Semmering Railway” has become role model for the inclusion of the Indian Darjeeling-Himalaya Railway that had also been in danger of being closed down. Today, it is extremely popular – like the Nilgiri mountain railway and the Kalka-Shimla mountain railway that have been combined by the World Heritage Committee to form one Indian world Heritage site. The latest transboundary railway World Heritage site, the Rhaetian Railway between Thusis in Switzerland and Tirano in Italy enjoys increasing popularity, too; immediately after the inclusion in the world heritage list its huge viaducts have been completely restored at considerable cost.

The book at hand is not only an overdue oeuvre on the “World Heritage Site Semmering Railway” and its enchanting surrounding landscape; it also shows up the dangers threatening this extraordinary cultural heritage. For should the Semmering railway be replaced by a base tunnel this would lead to a closing down and, in the worst case, to the decay of this outstanding mountain and landscape railway. An inscription into the “Red List of World Heritage in Danger” would be the consequence. From today’s point of view it is therefore important to point out the significance of this railway line constituting part of the Südbahn between Vienna and Trieste. The present guide book does not only describe the Semmering Railway as a railway line of universal importance and the UNESCO World Heritage Convention as the most successful international treaty for the protection of the world community’s natural and cultural heritage but also the exemplary initiative for the salvation of an important cultural and natural good of our globe.

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