

Future Today

HOW HOLES GENERATED INCOME AND SAVED LIVES

It was July 19, 1934, when a spectacular rescue operation of climbers occurred at an altitude of 2,865 metres, in the middle of the steep **Eiger North Face**, the most dangerous face known in alpinism. The day before, the German climbers Kurt and Georg Lowinger with their compatriot Willy Beck had entered the wall – for the first ever attempt to climb the infamous north face of the 3,967-metre high Eiger-Mountain. Like so many subsequent attempts, this one failed when the climbers fell, but they survived thanks to the safety rope. In a recovery effort, Swiss mountain rescuers threw ropes over the snowfield which stretched to the west and separated the victims from their rescuers. Numerous throws failed but the brave mountain rescuers did not give up. Eventually, all three were saved from the life-threatening situation. Rescued and rescuers **disappeared into the mountain**.

Into the mountain? Yes - into the mountain! That this rescue operation from the north face of the Eiger was even possible, was due to an ingenious technical masterpiece of Swiss tourism development 35 years earlier; **the Jungfrau Railway**. It was only via this route that the rescuers could reach the victims at all, namely from the "Eigerwand" station, from whose viewpoint in the middle of the Eiger North Face, tourists would usually enjoy the magnificent view over the Bernese Oberland on their journey up to the Jungfrauoch. After the rescue, the train quickly and safely brought the men back to the valley.

It all began on August 26, 1893, during a trip to the Bernese Oberland, when the wealthy Zurich textile industrialist Adolf Guyer-Zeller (1839 – 1899) developed the

fantastic idea **to build a railway to the summit of the Jungfrau-Mountain at 3,500 metres!** That same evening, he outlined his bold plan in his notebook and had already roughly drawn the planned route.

In the spring of 1895, Urs and Reto Beuri sat in the salon of their Basel family villa. Together the two brothers managed the family's fortune and discussed new investment opportunities. "Have you seen the documents for the planned Jungfraubahn?" asked Urs. "I only browsed them for a short time, but **I don't think it is possible to tunnel 7 kilometers through an entire mountain and to lay railway tracks there all at an altitude of almost 3,554 metres.** I cannot imagine a project like this working! After all, there have been other attempts in the past to build on a railway line up to the Jungfrau-Mountain; all of which were unsuccessful." Replied his brother. But Urs was not willing to admit defeat immediately. "You have a fascinating view of the Swiss mountains and glaciers from there. And tourism is a rapidly increasing industry since the *Kleine Scheidegg* was opened up by rail two years ago. Such a train would certainly attract many passengers. And this project is much better planned than the previous projects. The Jungfraubahn will start from the *Kleine Scheidegg* and will therefore be easily accessible for tourists. In addition, the founder, Adolf Guyer-Zeller, is a well-known and serious entrepreneur. He is investing heavily in the project himself. Last year, he set up a bank in Zurich to secure the financing." "That's true," Reto admitted. "Despite this, the technical and financial risks are enormous, and it would take years until any income could be generated!". And what if everything cannot be completed at all? What do we have then? A share in a big hole in a mountain!"



"Your arguments are correct, but you are still wrong" Urs replied with a bit of anger in his voice, because he knew that his brother had only quickly skimmed over the documents. "Look: Guyer Zeller has been very smart and considered the risk of not reaching the top. He has included **various stops at different altitudes with large holes for viewpoints, terraces and even restaurants.**"



He unfolded the plan, which gave an overview of the construction project and pointed to the sites. "Here, look at the stations and viewpoints names: "Eiger Glacier", "Eigerwand" and "Eismeer". As soon as these are reached, the railway will start operating there and the first income will flow while the rest of the railway continues to be built." This was the moment Reto took a second and closer look at the documents and began to understand the clever concept and the ingenious idea behind it. **Generating income during the construction and the further the project advanced, the higher the income.** Not only by passengers but also by the franchise payments of the operators of the restaurants. That was something quite unique. Something that could only be realized with a project like this. Urs seemed to read Reto's mind "You can't build a lookout and open the lower platforms for the public while building the rest of the tower above. But at this mountain railway it is not a problem at all!

It became a long night for the brothers but the decision to invest in the Jungfrau Railway, was a decision they did not regret for the rest of their lives.

Although the construction work took 8 years longer than planned, the Jungfrau Railway with all its holes in the north face was ceremonially inaugurated in 1912. **Since then, this technical marvel has become the most profitable railway line in the world.**

The construction of the Jungfraubahn was a project without precedent – creating a forward-looking "structure" that continues to enjoy growing popularity today: in 2019, more than 1 million tourists travelled to the Jungfrauoch! Adolf Guyer-Zeller correctly assessed the wishes of mountain visitors for well over 100 years! In order to be able to build the railway, **he also created secondary structures to finance his project and a hydroelectric power station** for the power supply of the construction workers in the high mountains.

More than 120 years ago, intelligent entrepreneurs knew how to take advantage of diverse structures for themselves and their goals. And sometimes such structures can also be used for some unforeseen purposes during their lifespan as the three young mountaineers learned in 1934. Even today, the most diverse structures exist and can be used to achieve different entrepreneurial and personal goals.

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