

YOU CAN IF YOU THINK YOU CAN

Ted still welcomes guests. It was to this hotel that Whymper, the first man to climb the Matterhorn, returned from his triumphant but tragic climb on which three men died. A bronze plaque near the entrance commemorates the event.

Ted Seiler told us that, next to climbing the Matterhorn, the most dramatic way to view it was to fly around it and over it in a helicopter. He added that a pair of helicopters, flown by German pilots, was kept on the alert at all times on the outskirts of Zermatt. There was a small one that could carry four persons, and a larger one that could take six. They had already made several highly dramatic mountain rescues. Ted Seiler said that if the weather was right, he might be able to arrange for us to make a mountain flight over the nearby peaks and glaciers. He said that if we did, we'd never forget it.

It sounded exciting, all right, but also a little scary. I had been in a helicopter only once in my life, to view some farm acreage. But Norman, on the trip he made to Viet Nam at the request of President Nixon, had made many helicopter flights.

All through the first part of our visit, the weather was uncertain. Much of the time swirling clouds shrouded the Matterhorn. When they would part momentarily, we could see that the slopes around the great peak were covered with fresh snow. But the pinnacle itself was too steep for much snow to cling to the jagged rocks.

Perfect Day in the Alps

The night before our last day in Zermatt, the wind switched to the north—a sign of fair weather, Ted Seiler said. Sure enough, the next day dawned sparkling and bright. The sky was a deep, cobalt blue—not a cloud in it. Golden sunlight poured down on the streets of Zermatt, gay with banners and coloured awnings and window boxes full of petunias and geraniums.

BORED? FRUSTRATED? FED UP? WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT

A telephone call was made to the heliport, a square of concrete built into a hillside just above the railway line on the north side of the town. We were told that if we would come there at eleven o'clock, there was a good chance that we could make the flight. The big helicopter was undergoing repairs, but the small one was operational. Since there would be room for three passengers in addition to the pilot, Arthur Gordon, who was also in Zermatt, said he would like to go.

It was a ten-minute walk to the tall, silo-like structure that housed the elevator that lifted visitors to the heliport. We pressed a button, identified ourselves through a transmitter like the ones you see in the lobbies of apartment houses, and shortly found ourselves standing on a huge square of concrete about half the size of a football field. A painted circle with a large H in the centre was evidently the target for descending pilots. Through the open doors of a hangar we could see the large red machine being worked on. We were told that the smaller helicopter was off on patrol, but would return shortly.

We sat in the brilliant sunshine, waiting. My feelings were a mixture of excitement, anticipation, and a little apprehension at the thought of soaring off the friendly earth in a plastic bubble supported by nothing but a pair of ungainly windmill blades and a single engine. As we waited, we talked about Whymper and mountain climbing and the strange and dangerous things people seem to do in their quest for happiness.

Our ears picked up the pulsing drone of the helicopter before our eyes saw it. Then suddenly there it was, hovering like a gigantic dragonfly. The pilot swung around into the wind. With a roar and buffeting gusts of the cool mountain air, the machine settled onto the concrete platform. The pilot cut the engine. The whirling blades gradually ceased revolving and grew still.

The fuel tanks were refilled. Certain mountain-rescue