

Their Swiss Tour was a daring adventure - 59 years ago

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Ugo Koblet, 26-year-old Swiss cyclist, won Europe's greatest bicycle race, the 2900-mile Tour de France, with an aggregate time of 142 hours 20 minutes 14 seconds.

A young man, under the influence of alcohol, jumped into the swimming pool of a polar bear at the Zurich Zoo. A few minutes later the female polar bear "Gretel" dived into the basin, and tried to get hold of him. Owing to the efforts of some of the visitors and one of the keepers the young man was rescued from his perilous situation without suffering any injuries.

In Switzerland, sixteen power stations are under construction or being rebuilt at the present time, the Swiss Electricity User's Association was told at its recent meeting. These will provide an additional 2,000 million kWh. annually by 1956. Last year, four large power stations and several smaller units were put into operation.

This year, the number of tourists entering Switzerland via Basle was 520,000 in July and 510,000 in August. This shows a very considerable increase compared with last year's statistics, which indicate an average of 300,000 visitors. From the beginning of the holiday season, that is, from June to the end of August, a total of 1.3 million tourists have entered Switzerland at Basle, that is about twice as many as last year.

TELEVISION IN ALL AMERICAN CINEMAS THROUGH A SWISS INVENTION.

After long negotiations the 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation has succeeded in getting a permit from the Columbia Broadcasting System to transmit television programmes in colour. The transmission to the big cinemas is done through the famous Swiss Eidophor-Projection system. The 20th Century-Fox Film Corporation has bought, some time ago, the right to use the idophor system from the Physical Research Institute of the Polytechnical School in Zurich. The agreement with the Columbia Broadcasting System now makes it possible to transmit shows of all kinds from the big cities to the smallest suburban cinemas of the United States. In American television circles it is stressed that the Swiss Eidophor Ssystem is the most perfect procedure for the transmission of big pictures and, therefore, best suited for television.

THE LION OF LUCERNE GETS A NEW SKIN.

The Lion of Lucerne, which was sculptured in the year 1820-21 by the sculptor. Ahorn, from Constance, after a model of the great Danish master, Thorwaldsen, has greatly suffered from the influence of the weather. After several works of amelioration and all sorts of experiments, it has now been decided to make a complete restoration, which will cost about Sfr.10,000. Already a sculptor and a stone mason have been working for a month to replace the missing parts, especially the left paw of the lion.

THEIR SWISS TOUR WAS A "DARING ADVENTURE" — 59 YEARS AGO

From the "SWISS OBSERVER."

Exactly 59 years ago the first large party ever to leave Manchester on an organised tour to Switzerland steamed away from the city with a rush of excited cheers and whistles echoing in their ears.

There were 74 of them in the party, including 39 women wearing the flowing, voluminous skirts and wide-brimmed hats of the day. It was organised by the Manchester Touring Club, forerunner of the dozens of travel agencies that now send thousands of Mancunians on Swiss holidays every year.

Dawn was breaking as they set forth for the Continent. On the boat they were given the choice of either beef steak or mutton chop and coffee for breakfast. They all considered it "a fairly good meal" as well they ought for it only cost them two shillings each.

If beef steaks were nothing unusual for the travellers they soon found more worldly surprises in store for them. The splendour that greeted them in their first continental hotel, for instance, brought gasps of amazement from the incredulous Mancunians.

"The dining room was an agreeable surprise," they recorded, "and the electric light shone around in a pleasant manner."

Lucerne, today's No. 1 Swiss attraction to British visitors, was their eventual destination. It was the time when Lucerne was first being opened up as a holiday centre. The ring of steep walls and turrets, built to keep out undesired neighbours in the fourteenth century, were now turning on all their medieval charm to welcome the visitors who were beginning to flock from all parts of Europe to see this fairy-tale city tucked away amid the Alps.

The party from Manchester was suitably impressed. In these days the English tourist goes to Switzerland for food first and scenery second, but in 1892 scenery came first every time.

They had their share of all the beauty-spots within reach. One day they climbed the 5,900-foot Rigi, which dominates Lucerne, by Switzerland's first mountain railway, built 20 years previously. It was this railway, incidentally, that was taken as a pattern when the Snowdon railway was built, and the first rolling stock to be used on the Welsh mountains was bought second-hand from the Swiss authorities.

They did plenty of sight-seeing. But when the day's excursions were over, what then? Lucerne was only beginning to develop into the gay holiday centre it is today. All the luxurious hotels, the elegant Casino and numerous entertainments that vary according to the season were mostly still a dream.

The Mancunians' chronicler gives the answer in one long sentence:

"When you are tired out with the pleasuring of the day, it is a great treat to hire a boat at eventide and gently push out into the bright clear lake, then lean back, light your cigar and meditate."

These early English tourists, like the millions more who were to follow them later, revelled in showing the foreigners they were English and proud of it. The Swiss, they observed, used to watch their proceedings, as they dallied around, with an air of calm serenity."

And they touched on a prophetic note that was soon to become only too true when they remarked: "We were probably looked upon as the advance guard of a troop of English tourists who would, by and bye, swarm down upon them from Europe and America."

Yet, although the Swiss tourist industry, destined to become the most highly-powerful in the world, was at that stage only in its infancy, they found that the Swiss were far from insular.

On their way down from the excursion to the Rigi they saw something that "well tickled the fancy of those who noticed it." It was an immense sign outside a picturesque and otherwise unspoilt mountain chalet proclaiming in English to all and sundry that "GRUB IS BALM."

The writer of the tour's log observed: "The title was fully justified. Can it be denied that opportunities for arriving at a closer intimacy with others of the party did not occur daily? And were not many of the "unattached" ones on the look-out for whatever contingencies might occur? And as a result was not the Tour a success in many other ways? Oh yes."

Land Improvements.—The oldest of the more important joint works of land improvement in Switzerland are the "Bisses" in the Canton of Valais, and the irrigated meadows. While the latter decreased since the introduction of the ley farming and improved meadow

A special agricultural building office was set up by the Swiss Farmers' Union in 1917. It controls the building of convenient new structures, and enhanced endeavours are made with a view to combining aesthetic improvements with traditional architectural forms. Buildings erected by that office have had a strong influence, and have a stimulating effect on the work of other architects and builders.

The income of the Swiss people in 1950 was 17.4 billion francs, or almost as much as in the peak prosperity year of 1948. This sum is 400 million frs. above the one in 1949. Swiss economists are calculating that the value of income in 1950 was the biggest in history because all prices were below those of 1948. The wages in October, 1950, show an average value including all type of workers, helpers and journeymen alike, the following figures: Graphic arts 3.36 frs. an hour (in 1939: 1.85); metal and machine industries 2.53 frs. (1.36); watch industry 3.01 frs. (1.47). It is obvious that experienced men receive more than this average and the increases are much higher among the women employees. Swiss wage earners were never as well off as they are now.

The Swiss Federal Council has asked Parliament for a credit to install a trial television transmitter which would reach about 1,000,000 subscribers from Zurich.