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Unspunnen celebrates and looks forward to welcoming Swiss Abroad

When Swiss Abroad meet up for their 83rd annual congress in Interlaken in the Bernese Oberland, they will witness a special celebration of Switzerland's most important alpine festival: the Unspunnenfest will be 200 years old.

As far back as the early 13th century, celebrations of reconciliation and friendship were held on the Burgwiese in Unspunnen near Interlaken. The idea was to help smooth over tensions between town and country and between the ruling and the ruled. Even before the first Unspunnenfest in 1805, the political situation was tense. For centuries before this date, the citizens of the Bernese Oberland had repeatedly rebelled against the domination of the City of Berne. In their desire to become independent, they created their own canton in the Helvetic Republic between 1798 and 1803, putting town and country on an equal footing. The economic monopoly of guildmasters and patricians was replaced by a legally enshrined system of free trade and commerce. But this positive development was soon in danger when Berne's patricians regained political dominance and the Oberland was once more united with the old canton. The fact that the 195-seat National Council contained 125 burghers and the 27-strong Council of States 21 members of "ruling families" was the cause of much bad blood between town and country: the Oberland rightly regarded itself as once more "under the thumb".

The negative situation prompted Bernese magistrate Niklaus Friedrich von Mülinen, the governing official of Interlaken, Franz

Ludwig Thormann, art lover Sigmund Wagner of Berne and painter Franz Niklaus König from Unterseen, to organise the first Unspunnenfest. The idea was to foster the tradition of alpine shepherds who pooled their skills in a peaceful contest, as well as to demonstrate to city-dwellers the simple life of alpine residents, their customs and traditions, and in so doing promote mutual understanding. Alpine festivals also offered a welcome change of pace and injected variety into the lives of remote mountain dwellers. It gave farmers an opportunity to socialise and illustrate to visitors the richness of alpine farming life.

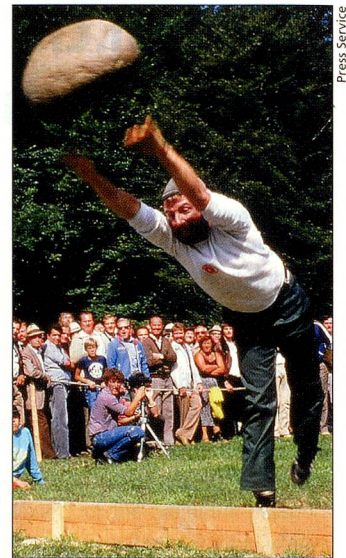
Thus it was that, in 1805, the first ball and stone throwers performed before a large number of honorary guests. Numerous stands were set up, selling religious pictures, calendars, chains and mementoes, and providing food and drink for festival visitors. And in the evening, while invited guests danced at the ball in Unspunnen Castle, young people tripped the light fantastic at various inns outside the festival compound.

While the first Unspunnenfest was a huge cultural and economic success, the presentation of rustic traditions failed to improve relations between rural and urban citizens: both segments of the population continued to view each other with deep mistrust.

Contrary to plans, Unspunnen festivals were not held every two or three years. The second festival was held almost a century later in 1905, and was intended as a festival of Swiss wrestling and alpine farming. But the colourful and traditional event was only truly revived as a Swiss costume and alpine festival in 1946. After the devastating war years, the third

Unspunnenfest was held in a spirit of peace, for which everyone fervently hoped. The guest of honour was General Henri Guisan. After 1946, the festival was repeated in 1955, 1968, 1981 and 1993. With each new festival, always held in the traditional manner, interest rose along with visitor numbers.

The 2005 Unspunnenfest will be a jubilee event, held 200 years after the original festival. Once more, the forthcoming festival will focus on contests between strong men attempting to throw the 167-pound Unspunnen stone a record distance. Swiss wrestlers will fight for the honour of the garland, folklore groups will dance to toe-tapping music, and alphorn players will blow their horns to win first prize. Needless to say, the traditional festival play and procession



The Unspunnen stone weighs 167 pounds.

through Interlaken will also be in evidence, providing visitors with a comprehensive insight into the variety of Swiss history and traditions in all parts of the country.

Heinz Eckert

Translated from German.

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad Summer Camps 2005

Young Swiss Abroad aged between eight and fourteen years old are invited to join our two-week camps on dates between 2 July and 4 September 2005.

There are still some free places for the summer camp in Stäfa (Lake Zurich), Wald (Appenzell), Torgon (Valais), Mannenbach (Lake Constance), Valbella (Grisons), Hasliberg and Beatenberg (Bernese Oberland). 30 to 50 children from all around the world will be attending each of these camps.

The parental contribution of CHF 800.- covers all accommodation costs. Parents must also pay the cost of travel to Switzerland.

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad aims to offer all Swiss children living abroad the opportunity

to take advantage of our arrangements. It has therefore set up a special fund for subsidised contributions. Application forms can be requested with the registration form.

For details on the individual holiday camps as well as the registration form, visit www.aso.ch (SJAS Section). Applications will be processed in order of receipt. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require further information.

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A multi-cultural Easter happening at the ASO camp

There is still free space for the ASO's Easter camp. From 25 March to 3 April, some 40 young Swiss Abroad will be meeting up to enjoy the spring sunshine in Upper Toggenburg. Register now!

You can register online for this winter sports camp in Unterwasser

on our web page at www.aso.ch. Just click on the "Youth" link. We look forward to a multicultural Easter happening complete with lots of fun and entertainment. You'll be sure to benefit from the ASO's ski and snowboard instructors. And we also offer an attractive range of off-piste activities.

The new summer brochure is ready to be sent all over the world. We'd be glad to send one to your home. If you can't make it back to Switzerland in the spring, we also have a wide range of exciting leisure and education arrangements on offer for the summer. Fancy spending your summer vacation in Switzerland? Young expatriate Swiss are recommended to book via the Youth Service.

As usual, information and details on the above arrangements are available from:

Organisation for the Swiss Abroad
Youth Service
Alpenstr. 26
3000 Berne 16
Tel. ++41 (0)31 356 61 00
Fax ++41 (0)31 356 61 01
youth@aso.ch
www.aso.ch

83RD CONGRESS OF THE SWISS ABROAD

1 to 4 September 2005 in Interlaken with UN Special Advisor Adolf Ogi and Federal Councillor Hans-Rudolf Merz

The 2005 Congress of the Swiss Abroad is being held to coincide with the Unspunnenfest

This year's Congress of the Swiss Abroad will coincide with the Unspunnenfest, the largest folklore event in Switzerland. This will guarantee an exciting and highly entertaining programme of events for all visiting Swiss Abroad. What's more, we have once more been able to invite some very prominent guests: ex-Federal Councillor Adolf Ogi, now the UN Special Advisor for Sport and one of the best-known Swiss outside Switzerland, will be attending, and Federal Councillor Hans-Rudolf Merz will be addressing congress participants on behalf of the Swiss government.

The Congress of the Swiss Abroad will be held in Interlaken between 1 and 4 September, at the same time as the Unspunnenfest featuring thousands of yodelers, Swiss wrestlers, stone-throwers and Swiss folk music groups.

The 83rd Congress for the Swiss Abroad will open on Thursday, 1 September, at 6.30 p.m. Friday, 2 September, is devoted to a plenary

session on the subject of tourism. The opening address will be given by Adolf Ogi, Special UN Advisor on Sport in the Service of Development and Peace, while Federal Councillor and Minister of Finance Hans-Rudolf Merz will give the traditional closing address to the Swiss Abroad.

On Saturday 3 September and Sunday 4 September, congress participants can enjoy the folklore performances and events. This year the "Unspunnen Costume and Alpine Cowherd Festival", usually held every 12 years, celebrates its 200th anniversary. Up to 70,000 spectators are expected to attend the huge folklore procession on Sunday 4 September. Seating has been reserved on the tribunes for congress participants.

Swiss tourism: between tradition and revival

The subject of the plenary session of the 2005 Congress is "Swiss tourism: between tradition and revival" – an appropriate topic for a convention held in one of Switzerland's most beautiful tourist regions. As the third largest export branch, chalking up CHF 20 billion

in income and employing some 240,000 people, tourism is vital to the Swiss economy. Every second franc is generated by foreign tourists (including Swiss Abroad).

Opportunities and risks for Swiss tourism, revival of the tourist tradition, successful Swiss Abroad in the hotel and catering industries, and other aspects will be discussed with top speakers.

Children and young adults can attend

Young Swiss Abroad can also enjoy the festivities! Between 22 August and 4 September, 2005, a holiday camp will be held by the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad (SJAS) in Beatenberg/BE. The 12- to 14-year-olds will be able to attend some congress sessions

and, needless to say, enjoy the Unspunnenfest. Children of congress participants can join these other Swiss Abroad children for the duration of the congress.

In addition, a special seminar on tourism is being held by the Youth Service from 29 August to 4 September for young Swiss Abroad aged 15 and upwards. The programme includes guided tours, meetings with interesting experts, and active participation at the Congress for the Swiss Abroad.

To find out more about the 2005 Congress of the Swiss Abroad and about arrangements for children and young adults, please complete and return the form below or e-mail us at congress@aso.ch, giving your full address.

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E-Mail	
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Please return the completed form by 30 April 2005 to: Organisation for the Swiss Abroad, Congress Organisation, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16