

News from Switzerland

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GROUP NEW ZEALAND OF THE NEW HELVETIC SOCIETY

17th YEAR.

APRIL, 1953.

AUCKLAND.

NEWS OF THE COLONY

Taranaki Swiss Social Club Picnic.

The Swiss Social Club's picnic, held at Kaupokonui on February 28th, was a great success. The weather was excellent and adults and children alike enjoyed themselves very much. It was particularly pleasing to notice so many of the younger folk present. Sports for the children, free ice creams, lolly-scrambles and so on proved to be most popular with them. The Swiss musical items contributed very much to the success of the day, especially the alp horn played by our able musicians. Of all the old Swiss sports, the "Steinetossen" seems to be the favourite one.

Winners of the "Steinetossen" were:—

First: Mr. D. Meier, Cheal Rd., Ngaere.

Second: Mr. Fr. Gwerder, Opunake.

Third: Mr. J. Muller, Eltham.

—W.R.

Taranaki Swiss Social Club Receives New Swiss Flag From Switzerland.

While Mrs. Ch. Schuler, Palmer Road, Kaponga, was home on a holiday trip to her beloved Bernese Oberland, she must have put in a good word for the newly formed Swiss Social Club in Taranaki. About a month ago a brand-new "Bundesfahne" arrived in Kaponga, a present from Mr. Albert Jung, Interlaken, to his far-away compatriots in New Zealand.

—W.R.

Taranaki Swiss Social Club.

The Annual General Meeting of the Club was held in the Mangatoki Hall on March 28th, 1953.

The balance sheet presented by the Secretary, L. Nolly, showed the Club's financial position in a very satisfactory state and the membership at 123 members.

Miss Ida Bernold, Messrs. F. Gwerder, P. Zimmerman, and Herm. Schicker retired from the Executive Committee. New members elected to the Executive are Mrs. J. Schupfer, Mrs. W. Risi, Mrs. Fr. Imhof and Mr. Ch. Wyss.

A resolution to hold this year's 1st August celebration for Club members only was carried unanimously. The fortnightly card evenings which proved very popular last winter will be held again this year, commencing in April.

NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND

New Type of Bus.

At the current International Automobile Show in Geneva, the Saurer Co. in Arbon is exhibiting a new type of bus equipped with a rear motor and specially designed as a replacement of a narrow gauge railway traffic. The bus is constructed like a railway carriage with smoking and non-smoking compartments, a luggage compartment, electropneumatic doors, ventilation, and other modern equipment. These vehicles could replace railway passenger and freight cars. The bus has a capacity of 80 passengers with luggage. It measures 80 feet in length with its trailer. The fact that the 200 h.p. motor is placed in the rear gives it an excellent weight distribution, something which is especially important in winter time.

International Recognition for Geneva's Chemical Industry.

Dr. Mas Stoll, research director of the Firmenich Chemical Company in Geneva, has been awarded the Fritzsche Prize for 1953 by the American Chemical Society. The award is in honour of Dr. Stoll's outstanding work in the field of synthetic perfumes. This is the second time that the prize has been awarded to a chemist connected with the Geneva perfume industry. In 1952, the prize went to Dr. Naves of the L. Givaudan Co. in Geneva.

Swiss Everest Expedition.

A few weeks ago, word finally reached Zurich that the Swiss Everest Expedition, led by Dr. Chevalley, had had to abandon its attempt on the world's highest mountain, when only 197 ft. from the summit.

The decision to call off the assault was taken on November 22nd. The long delay in passing the news on the Zurich was due to the difficulties in forwarding information in this wild and uninhabited region.

This is the method decided on by the Swiss Foundation for Alpine Research, sponsors of the expedition, and shows how word from the men on Everest finally reached civilisation. Messages are sent out by a portable short-wave transmitter on Everest itself and picked up at the base camp on the Khumbu glacier, and are then carried by native runner to Jaynagar, on the Indo-Nepalese frontier. From there they are forwarded to Patna, a town on the river Ganges, by ordinary Indian postal service. A Jesuit father in charge of a local school sends the messages in code from there direct to Zurich by radio. A small troupe of runners was on duty at the base camp since the assault party started on the long and wearisome climb up Everest. Every seven or ten days, one of them left for the journey to Jaynagar, 150 miles away. The route he followed took him along narrow mountain paths, over bitterly-cold snow-covered passes, across flimsy bamboo bridges thrown over gaping gorges, and along hot and dusty tracks hacked out of the jungle. A young and powerful runner knowing the country well can do the journey in ten to fifteen days, if he is lucky. In mountain country, he may cover only ten miles a day, but once he reaches the plain, he may be able to do 25 miles in a day. He travels light, with few clothes, little food, and the precious messages. And with him is his wicked-looking hunting knife, always at the ready. In those parts, you never know what might attack you.

M.V. "Berna" Launched.

The motor vessel Berna, 19,000 tons, was recently launched at Monfalcone, near Trieste. It will be the largest Swiss owned ship.

New Chairlift at Champex.

A new chairlift reaching right into the heart of the Alps has been inaugurated at Champex, the well-known resort in the Canton of Valais. In 20 minutes the chairlift takes passengers to a height of more than 7200 ft. to the mouth of the great Trient Glacier, near to the 8800 ft. Orny Hut and the Mont Blanc Massif. From Martigny (on the international Simplon line) Champex, 4920 ft. above the sea, is easily reached as far as Orsieres by train and postal coach beyond.

Castle of Chillon.

The popularity of the Castle of Chillon, noted landmark on the Lake of Geneva, is increasing year by year. The 800-year-old castle, made famous in the English-speaking world by Byron's poem, "The Prisoner of Chillon," was visited by 134,000 people last year—25,000 more than five years ago. Two hundred different groups were

taken over what is now one of the greatest historical attractions in Europe.

Surplus of 8000 in Switzerland.

The housing shortage has disappeared and there is now a housing surplus of 8000 houses in Switzerland as a result of last year's building boom.

Experimental Television Discontinued.

Experimental television in Basle has been discontinued through lack of public interest, the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation announced.

RAIL AND ROAD TRAFFIC IN THE SWISS MOUNTAINS

By H. O. ERNST, Manager, London Office, Swiss National Tourist Office and Swiss Federal Railways.

(Continued from January issue)

Avalanches are of two main types: "Staublewinen" and "Grundlawinen." Literally translated the former means "dust avalanche." It is so to speak airborne and consists of loose dry snow which travels with ever increasing speed more or less parallel to the ground. Its main destructive power lies in the tremendous air pressure created by its downward swoop. This force is sufficient to flatten whole forests, carry away buildings, road vehicles and to derail trains. The "Grundlawine" or "ground avalanche" consists of a mass of solid snow which has accumulated high up on a slope. Through interior strains and stresses caused by changes in temperature, rain or warm winds, it starts first to "creep" and cracks appear on its surface. As the adhesional force to the base diminishes, the movement increases and the whole weight, in many cases thousands of tons, is precariously balanced on the slope. At this stage a shout, a sound of a shot, or an animal, human or otherwise, walking or skiing in the vicinity, will start the avalanche. With tremendous force, preceded by a roaring gale of compressed air, it rushes valleywards, gathering not only speed but large rocks, tree trunks and almost anything else in its way. Torrents and rivers on its course are dammed and overflow. Roads and rail tracks are either carried away or buried under a huge pile of snow and debris. Some of the worst features of these avalanches are the suddenness with which they occur and the havoc and human misery they create. They are by no means infrequent, as the following figures show: In January last year Switzerland suffered the following avalanche casualties:

98 people lost their lives,
162 heads of cattle destroyed,
368 sheep and goats perished,
919 houses destroyed.

It is, by the way, a remarkable fact that at the height of the winter sport season there were no victims amongst our guests from abroad.