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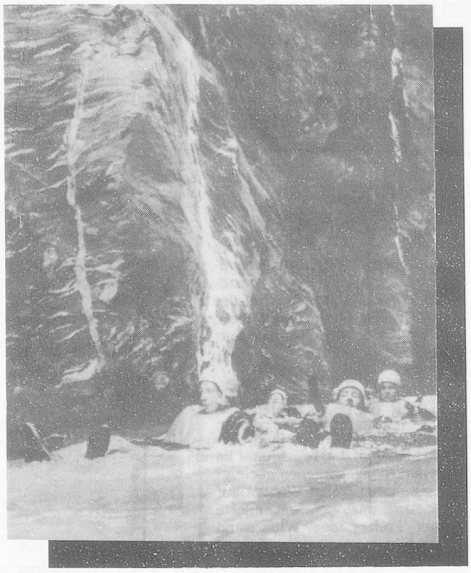
NEW WATER SPORT

Canyoning is its name. Dressed in neopren wetsuits, swimwests and helmets, the idea is to float down some of the most inaccessible "canyons", passed rocks and bolders and over small waterfalls.

One of the most sought after stretch of water in Switzerland for this new sport is the famous Via Mala in Graubünden where the Rhine sometimes is only one meter wide, forcing its way through 300 m high vertical cliffs.

An exciting new but rather cold sport since the water is seldom over 5 degrees Centigrad in these regions.

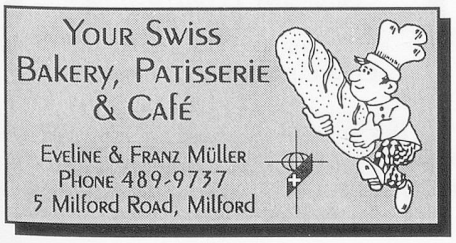


On the seats of your pants through the Via Mala.

PUBLIC HOSPITALS AS BUSINESS ENTERPRISES

New Zealand is not the only country where the Health Service and in particular hospitals are being transformed into real business enterprises. The same is happening in Switzerland. More and more pressure is put onto local governments to save taxpayers' money by turning public hospitals into self-supporting and profit making enterprises on the same lines as private hospitals. It is well recognised that public hospitals accumulate huge deficits because 2/3-3/4 of their patients only pay a small contribution towards their treatments.

To reduce the deficits, it is expected that the general trend in hospitals will now be for private patients to receive maximum service at maximum prices to increase the hospitals' income whilst the "public" patient will receive minimum service in order to contain costs. Sounds very familiar, doesn't it?



150 YEARS OF SWISS POSTAGE STAMPS

The postage stamp as we know it today was first introduced in Great Britain. In 1837 Rowland Hill suggested that in future postage should no longer be paid by the addressee but by the sender and that adhesive stamps should be used as proof that the correct postage had been prepaid. This led to the issue on 1 May 1840 of the first postage stamps: the "Penny Black" and the "Twopenny Blue", both bearing the likeness of the young Queen Victoria.

In Switzerland the postal services were exclusively the concern of the cantons until 1848. Encouraged by the developments in England, Zurich became the first canton, and also the first postal authority on the European mainland, to introduce prepaid postage using stamps. The "Zurich 4" for local postage and the "Zurich 6" for cantonal mail were issued on 1 March 1843. On 1 October 1843 Geneva followed suit with a stamp of its own, the "Double Geneva".

Basle-City was the third canton in Switzerland to issue a postage stamp. On 1 July 1845 the 2½-centime stamp - better known as the "Basle Dove" - appeared. It was to become extremely popular with stamp collectors and is still famous today. It was the first stamp in the world to be produced in three-colour letterpress and relief printing.

The Federal Constitution of 12 September 1848 made postal services throughout the country a federal business. The first Swiss stamp, as opposed to cantonal stamps, appeared at the beginning of May 1850. They were denominated at 2½ centimes and showed a shield with the Swiss cross. None of the stamps mentioned so far were perforated: they had to be cut from the sheet with scissors. The year 1862 saw the appearance of the "Sitting Helvetia perforate" series, which for several reasons can be regarded as the first modern postage stamps. Until about 1900 stamps were virtually limited to their primary role of furnishing proof of payment. Later they acquired a whole range of supplementary functions. Today, nearly all countries in the world use postage stamps to convey cultural and political messages. They are harnessed to promote tourism as well as patriotic and philanthropic causes. Colourful postage stamps are in a sense a country's visiting cards. Swiss issues, superbly designed by well-known artists, provide a fascinating overview of economic developments, art and history, flora and fauna and aspects of national life. And, of course, people all over the world collect stamps because of their attractive designs and interesting themes.

The new 60c issue shows the classic "Zurich 4/6" and "Double Geneva" stamps. The 80c value symbolizes the function of stamps in the postal service, while the 100c issue pays homage to the postage stamp as a collector's item. The set of three was designed by Harmut Billharz, a 3rd-year student of graphic arts at the Basle College of Design.

ANTI-BURGLARY SEMINAR BURGLED

A foodstore chain decided recently to hold a seminar to teach its senior staff the best procedures on how to prevent burglaries in their stores. Things went dreadfully wrong when the 40 participants went for lunch, leaving their belongings behind in the class room. Upon their return, they found that the whole place had been ransacked during their absence. The burglars not only stole thousands of dollars worth of money and personal effects, but also the car key plus the car of one of the participants to make a quick get-away. Ironically the theme of the seminar was: "How do I prevent my store from being burgled?".