

Alpine hutt for headaches

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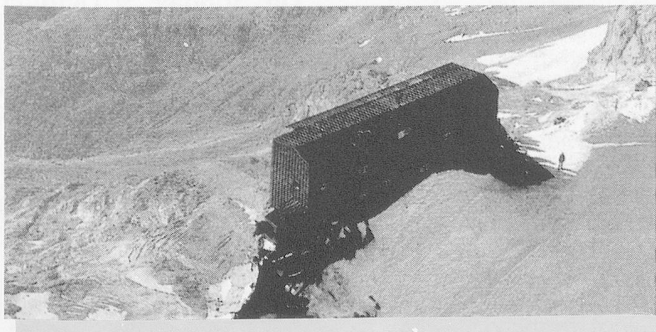
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ALPINE HUTT FOR HEADACHES

The Capana Margherita is Europe's highest alpine hutt, some 4554 m above sea level in the Monte-Rosa massif near the border between Italy and the Wallis. Over 12,000 alpinists climb up to this hutt every Summer. Many do this not only for sport but also to participate



The Margherita Hutt perched high up on a ridge, less than 100m below the Dufourspitze, Switzerland's highest mountain. The hutt was designed to accommodate some 76 alpinists, but with over 12,000 visitors a year, the hutt must deal sometimes with up to 170 tourists who cannot be turned away as the nearest other hutt is over 5 hours away.

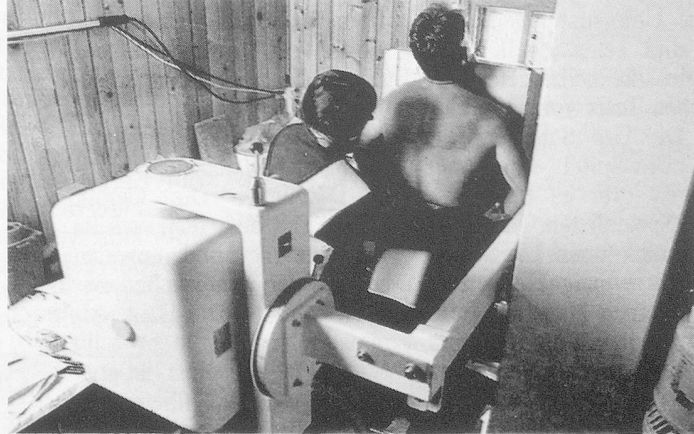
SWISSAIR'S SAD MOVE

Last month, after 25 years, Swissair closed down its only sales office in New Zealand. It was not due to lack of business opportunities since its European competitors (KLM, Lufthansa, Alitalia) are doing very well on the New Zealand market. The problem with Swissair was that it would never adapt its prices to the local market. It was always much cheaper (sometimes hundreds of dollars cheaper) to fly from New Zealand to Switzerland on any other airline than on Swissair.

Over the past 12 years Swissair was given first option on any Swiss group that your Editor was organising. Not one single Swiss group travelled to Switzerland on Swissair because either the price was not competitive or Swissair Head Office in Zurich point-blank refused to accept the group on the grounds that, although seats were available on the flights involved, these seats could be sold later on at a higher yield. That this gamble did not always work out was proven by the fact that flights from which some Swiss groups were banned eventually left without a full load of passengers.

The often very frustrated local Swissair staff had an impossible uphill battle in New Zealand which they could never win. Since 1991, Swissair has the rights to fly to Sydney but so far it has not taken up this option and, in the light of the closure of its New Zealand office, it seems unlikely that Swissair will open this new route in the foreseeable future.

in a specific research programme to establish the cause of altitude sickness which is characterised by strong headaches, nausea, vomiting, dizziness, total exhaustion and, in extreme cases, death. So every Summer a team of Swiss experts stay at the hutt with heavy equipment such as X-ray, blood-testing and oxygen machines being flown up by helicopter. Part of the hutt is transformed into a real high altitude laboratory where tests are being conducted on any alpinists who wish to take part in the research programme.



At 4556m the well equipped research laboratory certainly provides a unique service to alpinists who have fallen prey to the dreaded altitude sickness.

SAN BERNARDINO TUNNEL

Twenty-six years ago, it cost 150 million SFR to build the road tunnel under the San Bernardino Pass. Now necessary repair work will cost 160 million SFR, 10 million more than the original construction price. When the road tunnel opened, 850,000 cars passed through the tunnel during the first year. Now over 2 million cars use it yearly. The tunnel is 6.6 km long and is badly in need of repairs.

EXPENSIVE PARKING

If you ever cursed the parking charges in New Zealand, spare a thought for the "poor" Swiss drivers who have to cough up fees of up to SFR 5 for every 2 hours on street parking. And even so, the Swiss drivers are lucky as in Zurich the City Council's intentions were to charge up to SFR 9.50 for 2 hours but the proposal was defeated.



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