

Miss Jemima's Journey, 1963

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1963)**

Heft 1439

PDF erstellt am: **09.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-695102>

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MISS JEMIMA'S JOURNEY, 1963

Part Three in the story of this summer's centenary tour of Switzerland, written and illustrated by DEREK MEAKIN

According to the programme, they were to be up at crack of dawn to watch, from a mountain-top vantage point, the incomparable spectacle of the sun rising over the Alps, just as their predecessors did in 1863.

For the group of English tourists in Victorian dress, travelling through Switzerland to re-enact the actual events that happened during the first-ever conducted Swiss tour exactly a hundred years before, this was to be the highspot of it all.

Wrote Miss Jemima Morrell, in her chronicle of the original tour: "At three o'clock the winding notes of the arousing horn were heard, its blasts approaching nearer and nearer as each corridor was in its turn blown up. Truly this was an effectual awakener, as blow upon blow, blast upon blast, was twisted out of that bark-bound hookah".

A century later, however, Miss Jemima's party had an extra hour's lie-in. For it was not until 4 a.m. before the 14-foot-long alphorn was trundled along the corridors of the Rigi Kulm Hotel, lying just beneath the summit of the 5,700-foot Rigi, blasting out reveille.

Everyone dutifully tumbled out of bed, donned the voluminous, ankle-length nightshirts and nightcaps pro-

vided — the wiser ones wrapping themselves in warm blankets as well — and then the oddly-dressed party slowly shuffled its way up the steep mountain path that led to the peak.

There the 14 "Victorians", and more than 40 reporters, photographers and TV cameramen who were there to record their reaction to the splendid sight, waited for the supreme moment.

Unfortunately for all concerned, however, dawn just failed to crack.

Everyone waited with growing impatience as their watches passed the magic moment of 4.38 a.m. when — according to the programme — the sun should make its appearance.

But after half an hour everyone decided to call it a dawn and went back to the hotel, where a "typical English breakfast" of porridge was waiting to warm them up.

In general, however, the weather was kind. The sun may have been a late riser on the Rigi, but it shone brightly on most of the tour.

It was smiling on the high mountain hamlet of Wengenalp, 6,762 feet up in the Bernese Alps, where the party found a 50-year-old cannon waiting for them to play with.

Cannon-firing seems to have been one of the delights of Alpine holidaying a hundred years ago, with people paying 50 centimes a time in order to hear the sound of the shot echoing from mountain to mountain.

Several members of their party tried their hand at it — each shot costing five francs, the price of gunpowder being what it is today! — and watched for the minor avalanches that were set off by the thundering reverberations.

The sun following them as in single file they climbed by horseback to Kleine Scheidegg where, after a generous barbecue, they relaxed in the shadow of the Eiger to listen to Vernon Jones, in the role of Paymaster of the tour, giving a reading from Byron's "Manfred".

And it greeted them again in Grindelwald, along with a brass band and a main street lined with more than 7,000 people and festooned with many thousand more union jacks.

The enthusiasm with which they were welcomed here was typical of the whole tour. In every town and village they passed through they were treated in right royal fashion. Sometimes they had as many as half a dozen different receptions a day — and they bore it all with remarkable fortitude!

When Yorkshire-born Jemima Morrell made that first Swiss tour a century ago it was nothing more than a pleasant holiday. Its re-enactment, however, despite the modern means of transport that were employed from time to time, meant plenty of hard work from early morning to late at night.

But the "Victorians" had the satisfaction of hearing from the British Ambassador to Switzerland, Sir Paul Francis Grey, who had dinner with them in Grindelwald, that for the cause of Anglo-Swiss friendship every minute they had spent had been well worth while.

Of one thing everyone is sure. There certainly won't be another tour like it until the year 2063!



Intrepid tourists dwarfed by the Grindelwald glacier.



Peaceful scene at Kleine Scheidegg as the travellers rest to listen to the party Paymaster quoting Byron.



Animation in the main street of Wengen as a smiling Miss Jemima Morrell leads the procession on horseback.