

Past and present of the Swiss Ski-School Associations Ski Courses

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His co-star in "The Good Old Days", Eira Heath, is not travelling with him. She is making the journey by airliner.

"Don't blame her really", said Jimmy when he was told. "Anyone who does it the hard way when there's a perfectly good Swissair service between London and Geneva must be a nut-case!"

(*Helvetic News Service.*)

PAST AND PRESENT OF THE SWISS SKI-SCHOOL ASSOCIATION'S SKI COURSES

By HEINZ GISLER

The Sports Editor of Switzerland's "Neue Zürcher Zeitung" tells the story of what has been described as "the world's biggest ski course" and how this annual early-winter event and ski-ing in general became important occasions for the promotion of "understanding between the nations".

May we remind you: There are two ski courses. In earlier years both courses were taught by the same instructors. Last year for the first time the two courses were completely separate although they took place concurrently. Both courses were organised by the Swiss Ski-School Association and over-all administration of both is handled by the business manager and technical director, Christian Rubi of Wengen. The ski-school directors course celebrated its thirtieth anniversary at St. Moritz in December 1963. In 1933, under pressure of foreign competition, representatives of the Swiss Railways, the Postal Telephone and Telegraph Association, the Hotel Keepers Association, and the Swiss National Tourist Office, organised a course for ski-school directors for the first time. The following winter a group of twenty "students" also participated in the course. In that same year the Swiss Ski-School Association was formed. Today its membership includes 120 ski-schools.

The number of "Students" grew from year to year, climbing quickly into the hundreds and then into the thousands. More than 3,500 applications for the 1963 ski course at St. Moritz were received from skiers from many different countries. This large participation materialized even though the course was not advertised publicly. It has become well known primarily through word-of-mouth advertising.

Last year the ski-school directors course had a special five-and-a-half day programme and the guests received six days of ski instruction from between 100 and 170 additional professional paid instructors. The ski-school directors course is important for the development of Swiss techniques of ski instruction; the course for ski-guests is more spectacular and more important in terms of promoting Switzerland as a wintersports centre.

Ski-School Directors as Students

Attendance at the annual course of instruction is obligatory for directors of Swiss Ski-schools. This is not primarily for the purpose of improving the ski technique of the ski-school leaders, many of whom have been successful racers for a number of years and have spent many

years as ski-instructors. The major purpose of this course is to achieve a unified ski technique and method of instruction. The Swiss Ski-School wishes to maintain a good reputation on a world-wide basis. Winter guests from abroad who visit briefly Verbier, Mürren and Davos should not be offered different styles of ski techniques and different methods of instruction in each place. Difficulties of this type must be investigated, differences adjusted and ambiguities eliminated. The course for ski-school directors which takes place every year before the start of the season offers the best opportunity to settle any possible differences.

The number of people who want to learn to ski or to ski better is growing like an avalanche. This is due largely to improved transportation facilities, newly developed ski areas, and the advertising slogan that a "Winter Holiday is a Double Holiday". For that reason it is especially important to know that in all ski-schools of the country a single, unified method of technique and instruction is offered.

In 1963 the group of 120 ski-school directors attending the ski-school course included four women. In addition to this group there were twelve candidates who were taking a fourteen day training programme to prepare themselves for the ski-directors examination. This group was instructed by a team of especially qualified teachers who are also ski-school directors. The instruction was given in twelve classes. In colourful sequence the group leaders took turns being students and the students took a turn as teachers. In this way every participant had an opportunity to give instruction in a particular turn — from the most elementary preliminary training to the final expert swing. Particular importance is attached to selecting the proper terrain for location of the classes.

Every ski-instructor is expected to be able to give instruction in at least two languages. This point is of great importance for the success of the Swiss ski-school. When the ski-school directors course comes to an end, the participants return to their own resorts where they conduct courses for the ski-instructors in their own schools. In this way all ski-instructors in Switzerland benefit from the programme and recommendations of the centralized course. Every ski-school is anxious to be properly prepared in all respects for the large number of clients who arrive when the high season begins just before Christmas.

Easily, Safely, and without Falling

The small and unobtrusive posters of the Swiss Ski-School issued by the Swiss National Tourist Office begin with a promise: The Swiss Ski-School leads the way to expert ski-ing. Immediately it states also a concrete purpose: one technique; one method; one goal: to ski over every terrain easily, safely and without falling.

The teaching programme develops in orderly fashion, using a method derived from the principles enumerated in this motto. The students learn balance as they practise walking, gliding and side slipping. Next they gain sureness and self-confidence through mastery of stem turns and stem christies. These basic techniques are particularly useful in difficult snow, when visibility is limited, or when one must ski with a knapsack. The parallel christie and wedel give the fast skier the feeling of weightless turning and flying both on the trail and in deep powder snow. No Swiss Ski-School avoids these advanced swings. They are an integral part of the programme. Even the very earliest, most basic instruction gives attention to the movements which provide the foundation for the more difficult wedel movement.

Abroad, nevertheless, the Swiss Ski-School does not advertise a national doctrine of ski-ing. One might say that the ski-school does not offer anything revolutionary in the way of ski technique. The Swiss remain in the middle between the French rotation system with the accompanying normal stance when traversing the slope and the over accentuated reverse shoulder swing of the Austrian school. Natural, deep arm position, relaxed shoulders, head high, avoidance of every stiffness and cramp. These are the broad general principles of the unified Swiss technique. This has not changed in any way in the last year. When something new is added, it is usually a new teaching method which brings students more quickly and more successfully to their final goal. When the main emphasis in the teaching programme seems to lie on the wedel, this is because all students, and especially the older participants, desire an introduction to this comparatively new method. In the ski-schools instruction in wedel continues to be offered only in the two most advanced classes.

The ski-school Directors returned to their own communities after one week in ski-school in order to participate in final preparations for the season with members of their own staff. The course for guests, however, is now scheduled for three consecutive weeks. In 1962 approximately 2,500 guests took part. Last year the fact that the course was at St. Moritz was responsible for an increase to 3,500. This great concentration of skiers made it possible for the course to be extended to three weeks,

thus providing hotels opened for the course with an opportunity to move smoothly and directly into the main season.

Three Week Guest Course — 3,500 Participants

About 2,000 of those taking part in the course were Swiss. For many years the course has attracted American military personnel stationed in Germany and Italy. In the courses at St. Moritz approximately 1,000 members of the American troops stationed in Europe joined the ski-classes. There were approximately 400 Spaniards and 100 Germans in attendance. France, England and Italy each contributed twenty guests. There were individual skiers from eight different foreign countries as well.

The improvement of international understanding was furthered not only in the snow and at lunch time with the help of the multilingual ski-instructors, but also in personal contacts during après-ski events and by various gala dinners. The international camaraderie was stimulated also by informal social activities and parties. Those who came alone did not remain alone for long. The fact that every year a large number of participants register for two weeks and in addition that many guests have visited ten or twenty or even more courses is concrete proof of the high esteem in which this course is held. It provides contact with the first snows of the season and with people from many countries who share an enthusiasm for the fine art of ski-ing.

(Condensed from an article in the "Neue Zürcher Zeitung", Zurich; English translation by Eleanor Gurewitsch.)



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