

# British women on their experiences in the Swiss Alps

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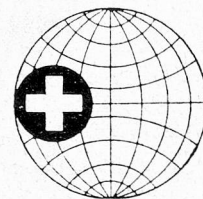
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# 1966 THE YEAR OF "FIFTH SWITZERLAND"



## ORGANISATION OF THE SWISS ABROAD

### Golden Jubilee

On 8th June 1916, the first group abroad of the Nouvelle Société Helvétique was founded in London. With it the foundation stone was laid for the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad of the N.S.H., thanks to the initiative and indefatigable efforts of Gonzague de Reynold.

It is also fifty years since the Swiss Industries Fair was started in Basle, and it was the MUBA which convened the first Assemblies of the Swiss Abroad. It has been decided, therefore, to celebrate the two jubilees at the same time in Basle on Saturday, 23rd April. The Government of the Canton of Baselstadt and the Management of the Swiss Industries Fair will take part in the

celebrations. The founder of the N.S.H., the famous writer and historian Gonzague de Reynold will honour the festive gathering with his presence. The ceremony will take place at the "Grossratsaal", the home of the Basle Parliament. A banquet will be given at the "Kleiner Festsaal" of the MUBA, where the ASO will be the guest of the Basle Government and the Management of the Industries Fair.

With this celebration, the jubilee year of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad will be opened. The Commission of the Swiss Abroad will hold the spring meeting on the day before in Berne.

## BRITISH WOMEN ON THEIR EXPERIENCES IN THE SWISS ALPS

The **Swiss Ambassador** gave an address to the Ladies' Alpine Club of Great Britain at their Annual Dinner in December. Monsieur de Fischer referred to 1965 being the "Year of the Alps", and to the centenary of the first ascent of the Matterhorn by an Englishman. He said that when Switzerland dedicated a whole year to the Alps, she naturally expected the weather to help make it an especially sunny and beautiful one. "Instead" continued the Ambassador, "there have been rain and storms and, in August, the dreadful Mattmark catastrophe, which caused so much mourning and distress. It was as if nature itself had intended to show that it would not allow the majestic Alps to be used by those who did not understand the profound significance of this dedication, for the satisfaction of the desire for sensation and the promotion of hurried and superficial journeys. For the wise observer of the Alps, it was obviously an invitation to return to the individual and respectful dialogue of men with the mountains."

Next, Monsieur de Fischer recalled the foundation of the Ladies' Alpine Club in 1907, "a sort of legitimate U.D.I., an emancipation from male-dominated clubs and a more feminine approach to the Alps". A great deal is known as to men's reactions to the mountains from their writings on the subject. But there have, actually, been quite a number of British women writers who have expressed themselves on this matter.

"First, there was the noble Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire, who crossed the St. Gotthard in 1793, at a time when the charm of the mountains had not been fully discovered; in fact, she did not refrain from saying that she preferred mild Italy to the rough Helvetian mountains. A little later, in 1798, and in the same spirit, Helen Maria Williams described her Swiss tour as "not so pleasant" and criticized many of the things she did not approve of.

"We find quite a different note, during the epoch of the famous 'return to nature', in Felicia Hemans's charming ballads composed in 1828 in honour of the Rütli, the Battle of Morgarten and the courageous Swiss women; but she disapproved of Mrs. Tell letting her husband shoot an apple from their son's head. Not long afterwards, a very flattering pamphlet indeed was dedicated to the Bernese mountain farmers by Lady Byron, the wife of the great poet; and Mary Shelley, the sister of Percy Shelley,

gave a moving account of her feelings on visiting the place near Geneva where her brother was drowned and Byron died. Next comes Dorothy Wordsworth, whose descriptions of mountain scenery Arnold Lunn thinks incomparably better than anything to be found in the works of her brother William, Shelley or Byron.

"After these more romantic writings, the era of modern tourism and mountaineering begins. In her amusing 'Swiss Journal' Miss Jemima relates the adventures of the first tour of Switzerland arranged by Thomas Cook for stiff-necked Victorians. A quite different sort of person was Lucy Walker, a perfect Victorian young lady too, who decided to conquer alone the highest and most difficult peaks, and usually succeeded. In 1871, she became the first woman to climb the Matterhorn, an achievement which inspired many writings, above all the famous poem "A Climbing Girl" published in "Punch" and the excellent book "They came to the Hills" by Dr. Claire Eliane Engel. It is particularly appropriate to mention Lucy Walker because she was the second President of the Ladies' Alpine Club. The next after her was the daughter of John Hadington Symons, a pioneer of British ski-ing; her name was Margaret Symons and in 1892 she published her very sensible notes on "Our Life in the Swiss Highlands". Her sister, Dame Katherine Furze, wrote on the same subject in "Hearts and Pomegranates". She is followed by Mary-Rose Fitzgibbon, one of the most experienced British women mountaineers, who made the first ascent of the Plan and the third and very severe ascent of the Wetterhorn, and whose descriptions of the "rainbow mountains" are most attractive. Then comes the fine book "Climbing Days", by Dorothy Pilley, who made the first and difficult ascent of the Dents Blanches in 1928. And lastly we have the excellent "Zermatt Saga" by Cicely Williams, a kind of companion piece to Lionel Terray's book "Les conquérants de l'inutile".

"These two works are good examples of a man's and a woman's views on the value and pleasures of mountaineering. Lionel Terray finds them in the duel between man and mountain, where climbing becomes an endeavour to achieve the triumph of the will, self-discipline, adequate technical preparation and harmonious teamwork over nature. Terray is a Puritan in will-power, and for him the thrilling conquest of a peak is what counts above all.

For him, as also for Whympfer, a peak once conquered had no more interest. Arnold Lunn, in his turn, thinks that the mountaineer's deepest fulfilment derives from the intellectual satisfaction of mastering the craft of route-finding.

"Ladies normally evaluate the matter quite differently: they, too, appreciate the exercise of will and discipline, but they enjoy also, and principally, the aesthetic side of their contact with the mountain; moreover, they want to know who lives there, how he lives, and how he got there. There is a personal and an emotional link between them and the mountain.

"This fact emerges clearly from most of the books by British ladies. Personally, I am very grateful to the authors for allowing me to share their joys and adventures in the Alps. This is enriching because, as you all know, the sport of mountaineering was invented by British people and not by the Swiss, who until then had regarded the mountains more as the magnificent *décor* of their dwelling, as their defiant protectors against invasion and as the majestic sanctuaries of the Almighty. But today, Swiss and British, men and women, see in mountaineering one of the finest sports, offering to each of the dedicated a great variety of physical, aesthetic and ethical satisfactions."

#### FIRST SKI LIFT IN THE CANTON OF ZUG

The resort village of Oberägeri, located on the historic shores of Aegeri Lake just 15 miles south of Zurich, has up to now been known primarily as a place for summer holidays. Its long and determined efforts to acquire a ski lift have finally been rewarded. Thanks to the efforts of ski enthusiasts in the city of Zug and vicinity, the first ski lift in the Canton was opened to the public in mid-December. Located at the top of the Raten Pass (alt. 3,696 ft.), the lift is some 2,080 feet long and climbs a total of 402 feet in elevation. Its hourly capacity is 700-1,000 people. The top of the Raten Pass, which connects Zug with the region around Lake Zurich, has long been a popular spot for family outings and offers hikers countless opportunities, with its woods and fields and fine views of the neighbouring Alps. A hotel is scheduled to be built at the top of the pass in the near future, and a bus line has expressed willingness to operate a service between Oberägeri and the Raten Pass three times weekly (Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays.) [S.N.T.O.]

#### A NEW TOY, IDEAL FOR SKI TRAINING

A new American toy, the "skateboard", a simple board attached to rollers, which is all the rage with teenagers in the U.S.A., is rapidly gaining popularity in almost all parts of the world. A Swiss roller-skate and tricycle factory at Wetzikon (Zurich) has adopted the idea and perfected it for use as a means of ski-ing without snow. It still consists of a board on rollers, but these are now mounted on shock absorbers, which makes it possible to slalom with the correct body movement, just as in ski-ing on snow. The "Skate-Board Kemp", a sporting toy, and the "Slalom Kemp Trainer", specially designed for slalom training on asphalt or cement tracks or in gymnasiums, have been tried out by Swiss ski and sports instructors, who have become very skilful in the use of these new "toys". The new Kemp board, which is not only great fun but offers an opportunity for slalom training all year round and even in town, promising well for its success with a very wide public. [O.S.E.C.]

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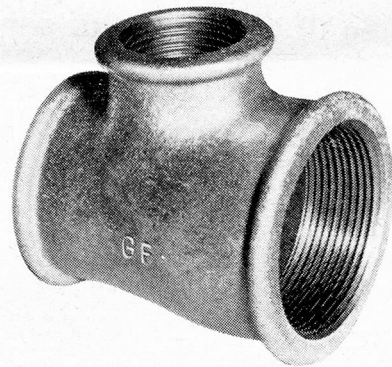
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