

Comment

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"I started to dig through the layers of snow in order to examine the consistency of the ice as well as its crystalline structure. The first day—after fixing my shoes—I dug through forty-three layers. Layer twenty-two was the thickest—ninety-one centimetres thicker than layer number four, which was the thinnest. Most of the layers were of finely packed powder snow, the best kind for skiing and other winter sports. Unfortunately, even though I have been working on the problem, skiing is still completely unknown here, and most people, except for children, hate the snow and winter generally.

"After I had diligently dug through the forty-third snow layer, I came upon the ageless ice of the Aletsch. How perfect it was—hard and blue and cold, as ice should be. I chipped out a piece to study more carefully. I blew at it and the moisture in my breath froze at once. I licked at it and my tongue stuck to it. It was indeed a very cold piece of ice!

"That day I continued to chip away at the glacier. After a few more centimetres, though I grew tired of this experiment and returned to camp for some sustenance. My study of the Aletsch may not be the most detailed in all of glaciology, but I hope it provides some information of use to scientists of the future."

Many years were to pass before the lessons learned from Galileo's glacial experiments could be utilized. For example, Galileo first verified the connection between low temperature and the formation of ice. The thermometer he carried happened to register —10° centigrade (14° Fahrenheit) and he noticed that water was always frozen at this temperature. Through a number of further tests Galileo was able, with a candle, to warm up the pieces of ice he took from the Aletsch and then let

them freeze again, measuring each time the exact temperature as they froze.

He continued his series of experiments for four or five months. At the end of that time, he averaged the temperature and concluded that the ice of the Aletsch Glacier began to water at 1° centigrade (33° Fahrenheit). Galileo's discoveries, although primitive by today's standards, have been extremely helpful to countless numbers of glaciologists the world over.

Galileo also recognised the relationship between altitude, atmospheric pressure and temperature. He knew that it became colder the higher one climbed, even if it was warm when one started. He knew, too, that the air became thinner and that pressure diminished. He devised the first successful formula for boiling eggs at high altitudes, one still used by many mountain hotels in Switzerland.

"The degree of albuminous viscosity of a boiling chicken egg," wrote Galileo, "is in large part determined by the height of the vessel in which it is being prepared. If the vessel is at sea

level, the egg may be cooked to a pleasant degree of doneness in three to four minutes. However, for every hundred meters of altitude added, one must allow a further nine seconds of boiling to achieve the same result."

This document, "Ten Tasty Ways to Boil Eggs in a Mountainous Country", could not have been written had Galileo never visited Switzerland. Only here was he able to transport his boiling egg—step by step—from the depths of the valleys to the heights of the highest Alps. As a result, Galileo deduced that it takes the longest time to cook an egg when one is trying to do it on the highest mountain, like the Jungfrau or the Matterhorn. In addition, the constant winds keep blowing out the cooking flame, so that it often requires an hour or more to finish the job. This can, of course, lead to further complications if there are a lot of hungry people waiting for breakfast in the Alps.

(By courtesy of the
Swiss National Tourist Office.)

COMMENT

DEFENCE OF THE FRANC

The stern package announced last month by Mr. Nello Celio, the Swiss Finance Minister, shows that the health of the economy remains the chief pre-occupation of the Swiss Government. As elsewhere in Western Europe, prices and costs have soared relentlessly during 1972, and forecasts indicate that this tendency will be maintained during this new year. Earlier last year, Mr. Celio had announced other measures intended to defend the Swiss Franc against foreign speculation. "One does not trifle with the Franc," he said. This statement illustrates the emphasis resting on the symbol of the Swiss Franc, and the close ties between the prestige of our currency and the standing of our economy in the world.

Although the order books of our main export industries are not bulging as they were a year ago, business is expected to remain good this year. Home consumption will continue to stretch the production machinery, particularly in the building sector, which

several federal decrees have attempted to keep under control.

Among Mr. Celio's latest set of proposals, which have been adopted by both Chambers of Parliament, the one setting up a price supervision agency met with the most criticism. It is however expected that a National Councilor and Cantonal Judge from Fribourg, Mr. Leo Schurmann, will be appointed as the first federal prices watchdog.

Despite these efforts, prices will continue to rise at the same pace this year. Milk products and meat will rise by five to fifteen per cent, entailing higher costs for the hotel trade. Old Age Insurance payments will rise considerably following the adoption of the 8th Revision of AHV. Television and Radio licenses are going up by nearly fifty per cent; postal rates are generally up, railway freight will cost about ten per cent more. The Government will increase the inflationary load on the economy by 250 million francs by awarding a 13th month of wages to all federal civil servants.

Despite the worries of economic experts, the Swiss will no doubt continue to enjoy another year of comfort and prosperity.

(PMB)