

Winter in the Swiss mountains

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WINTER IN THE SWISS MOUNTAINS

Every year when with the beginning of winter heavy clouds and fogs descend on hill and plain, increasing numbers come to Switzerland from all parts of the world to escape the gloom of the plains, seek health or recreation, indulge in winter sports and generally enjoy life in the alpine sun, under the radiant blue sky, under the magic spell of a white mountain landscape. More than a hundred different places are prepared for the reception and accommodation of visitors, while people in ill health have the choice between a large number of up-to-date sanatoria. The railways carry travellers in corridor carriages to the main points of attraction, while mountain railways take them up to the loftiest peaks. Hotels equipped with all up-to-date comforts are dotted over the country, from the shores of the lake of Geneva right up to Grisons and from the Jura to the Italian border. Quite a number of them have become truly international centres of winter sport and at the same time centres of international social intercourse. Others again are famed throughout the world as places of refuge for the afflicted whose new lease of health depends upon the healing rays of a mountain sun. All resorts possess the most up-to-date sporting equipment and thus afford opportunities of recreation as well as recuperation. The contrast between the imposing grandeur of the snow-covered mountain world and the entertainments of civilization never fails to exercise a unique charm. Those who love solitude, quiet, and simplicity may pass by the chief centres of the winter season to some smaller secluded spots. The winter resorts are spread over an altitude range of about 2000 meters, and include the health resorts on the shores of the Lake of Geneva and the Lake of Ticino, chiefly frequented by those who prefer a warm climate, and the highest winter stations like the Little Scheidegg (2066 m.) or the Muottas Muraigl in Grisons (2456 m.). The majority of the principal winter resorts are situated between 1000 and 2000 meters above sea level. Taking them in succession from west to east they are distributed over the Jura, the Canton of Vaud, the Canton of Valais, the Bernese Uplands, certain parts of Central Switzerland, and Grisons. Much as they may differ in landscape character, languages and customs of the population, tradition and architecture and also certain climatic peculiarities, they all afford their guests every opportunity for enjoying the captivating charms of the mountainscape, indulging in sport, and generally feeling at home in the society of nationals of many countries.

During the development of the Swiss winter season every kind of sport has been encouraged, expanded and from a technical point of view improved. Skating was introduced from the well-watered low countries. As sporting activities increased, international matches were inaugurated, and the alpine winter resorts have more and more become the battleground for contesting championships, and a Swiss winter season is no longer without professional skaters. The ski sport rose from a contrivance designed to move over the deep snow with the least possible exertion, for it surpasses every other means

for disclosing the beauties of the wintry mountain world and at the same time enables its followers to display a maximum of physical power and skill by bold ski jumps. The old sledges gradually developed into the steerable racing machines of the bobsleigh. While the sporting practice of ski running came from Norway, the pioneers of the perfection in bobsleigh racing were Englishmen. The sleigh itself improved more and more, and the speeds obtained increased so that the races run to-day are perfectly organised sporting entertainments in which the most up-to-date time checking instruments are used recording differences in fractions of a second. In contradistinction to this sport ice hockey and curling (a sort of bowling game with flat rounded-off discs) have rather the character of harmless games. Horse racing in its various forms has also been transferred to the ice and even tennis games are played on the ice.

The Jura range which trails along the North-West of the country and rises up to 1600 meters displays a landscape entirely different from that of the Alps. It has a rough but sunny winter, a deep covering of snow and a clear uninterrupted frost. The best-known winter sporting places in the Jura are the old watchmakers town of Ste. Croix, which is connected with Yverdon by a railway over bold serpentine curves, and a place called Les Rasses. The peculiar topography of this mountain range makes it singularly suitable for ski sport. Not far from it the Lac de Joux offers a natural skating-rink of 9 kilometers length.

Around the eastern corner of the Lake of Geneva are situated the centres of winter season life in the canton of Vaud. To the South-East and above the Rhone Valley lies Leysin, well-known as the seat of excellent institutes for heliotherapeutics and as a meeting place for winter sports. Villars-Chesières, 1300 meters high, is charmingly situated on a wide, sloping plateau, below the Grand Muveran, and connected with Bretaye, 1850 meters high, by a railway.

The best-known health resort and sporting ground in the Valais is Montana-Vermala on the slopes of the «Wildstrubel» in a most charming dry sunny climate and with a wonderful view of the Rhone Valley.

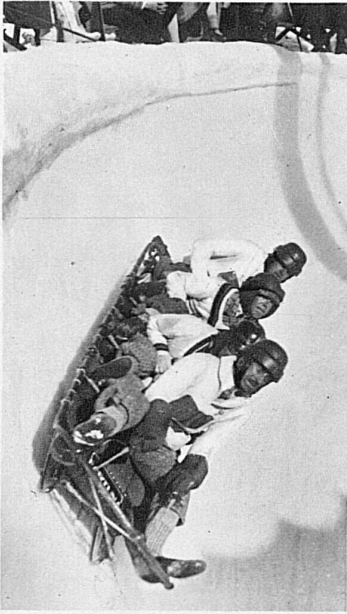
A well-known international centre for winter sports is Caux situated above Montreux at an altitude of 1121 meters and connected by a mountain railway with the 2000 meter-high Rochers de Naye. The Montreux-Bernese Upland Railway leads past Les Avants with its nearly three kilometers long bobsleigh run to Château-d'Oex into the Bernese Uplands touching a number of well-known winter sporting places such as Gstaad in a spacious valley, Saanenmöser with its six kilometers bobsleigh run and Zweisimmen. The entire district appears to have been just made for ski sport. At various altitudes above 1000 meters and surrounded by most imposing forest-clad mountains is a number of well-known centres of the Alpine winter season, such as Grindelwald with the mighty background of the Wetterhorn, Adelboden in the district of the Wildstrubel which possesses one of the finest ski jumping grounds, Kander-



Wintersonne / Soleil d'hiver / Winter Sunshine / Paesaggio invernale

Phot. A. Steiner, St. Moritz

Winterfreuden



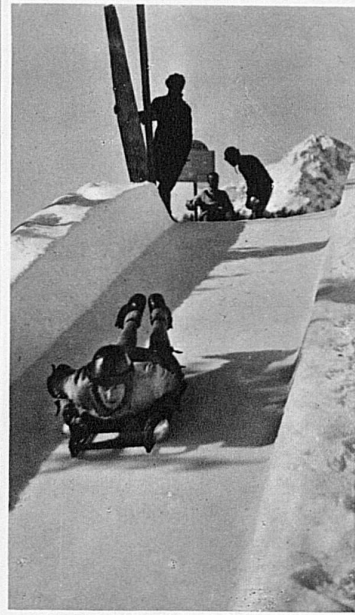
Phot. Meerkämper, Davos



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*Winter Sports
Svaghi invernali*

Plaisirs d'hiver



Phot. A. Steiner, St. Moritz



Trabrennen / Les courses sur la glace / Races on the Ice / Corse sul ghiaccio

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Grimmialp & Raufihorn



Stiller Winkel / Solitude! / A quiet Nook / Quiete invernale

Phot. E. Meyerstädt, Engelberg



Kunstlaufen auf dem Eise / As du patin / Fancy Skating / Virtuosismo sul ghiaccio

Phot. O. Rutz, St. Moritz



Auf sonniger Höhe / Sur nos monts quand le soleil... / Sunshine and Snow / Sole e neve

Phot. O. Rutz, St. Moritz



Eisspiele / Les jeux sur la glace / Ice Hockey and Curling / Giochi sul ghiaccio

Phot. O. Rutz, St. Moritz

steg on the romantic Lötschberg railway, Mürren and Wengen within close reach of the Jungfrau.

The Little Scheidegg which has the Jungfrau, Mönch and Eiger for a background is the second-highest winter station in Switzerland. The Bernese Oberland possesses with the terminus of the Jungfrau railway, the Jungfraujoch, at an altitude of 3457 meters not only a comfortable hotel but also the highest winter sporting place in Switzerland. For the last ten years have ski races been held here in the middle of summer. In Central Switzerland Engelberg surrounded as it is by hills and mountains is exceptionally favourable for ski sport, and the bobsleigh run on the Gerschnialp is regarded as one of the finest in the country. The most popular sporting place in the Rigi district is Kaltbad. In the St. Gotthard district Andermatt affords splendid opportunities for enjoyable ski runs in the midst of the central mountain passes of the Alps.

Grisons, the largest canton in Switzerland and the border state between it and Tyrol and Upper Italy, with its 150 valleys, its many groups of mountain giants and the ever changing aspect of its landscape represents perhaps the most compact mountain country. Fully one third of its 120,000 inhabitants still speak, Rhaetian or neo-Latin, a language which arose as a result of the Roman occupation and survived the many centuries of Germanisation. As in the southern parts of the canton the Italian language is spoken, three different languages are here living peacefully side by side. Its little towns, castles, and hamlets still hold many architectural monuments of the past and the national character has preserved its distinct peculiarities untouched by the changes which the development of centuries has brought over the plains. A special geographical feature of the country is its numerous exceptionally elevated valleys (up to 2000 meters). Grisons has a pure and dry climate, an intensive sun radiation during the winter and great constancy of winter weather from December to the middle of March. The first thing that brought this development about was the discovery of the wonderful advantages of such Winter climate for combating lung diseases; but soon a steady stream of tourists set in and we find at present world-famous centres for the treatment of tuberculosis and other diseases, together with places of summer and winter recreation in this bounteously endowed little Alpine country. Boldly conceived railways, like the Rhaetian, the Bernina and the Chur-Arosa Railway have made the countless beauties of nature right up to the glacier zone accessible to visitors. The Furka Upper Alp Railway forms a direct connection between the Grisons and Central and West Switzerland, between Disentis and Brig. A net of roads passes through many regions of wildly romantic beauty, the best-known being the Via Mala, the mountain passes Bernina, Maloja, Splügen, Bernhardin, Lukmanier, Julier, Albula and Flüela. The National Park of Switzerland is situated in the Lower Engadine and is for the preservation of the Alpine Fauna and Flora in their natural state.

Chur, the imposing capital of the Canton is the port of entry to the main centres of winter sport spread in

a wide circle from east to south such as Arosa, Davos, Klosters, Lenzerheide and the world-famous resorts of the Upper Engadine, such as St. Moritz, Celerina, Pontresina, Samaden, Silvaplana, Sils, and Maloja. Davos and Arosa are places of refuge and hope for all those who look for healing of their afflictions from the radiance of the mountain sun and the clear dry atmosphere of the mountain winter. In the course of time these two places have also risen to a position of prominence as places for all winter sport. On the skating ground of Davos skating championships have been contested for the last thirty years. At Lenzerheide, in close vicinity to Davos and Arosa the first ski race was run and the first performance given in ski jumping. That proved the starting point for the development which finally led to the erection of ski jumps at the main sporting centres, of which the first was the Julierschanze near St. Moritz, to be followed by others such as the Berninaschanze near Pontresina at which a jump of 63 meters was executed last winter. The latest equipment of this kind is the Olympiaschanze at St. Moritz, now in the course of construction. It is to be used for the first time at the Olympiad this winter and is to afford a possibility of making ski jumps up to 81 meters (262 ft.). St. Moritz is the birthplace of the bobsleigh. The classical run for these races is the world-famous 'Cresta-Run' which commences on a level with the village of St. Moritz and ends at Celerina. In a sporting and social sense St. Moritz has become a winter resort of the first order. It has an altitude of 1856 meters. Its numerous skating rinks are crowded, and games of every conceivable kind are played on the ice including curling and hockey matches, while horse races and skijörings are run on the lake, and bobsleigh and skeleton races and jumping competitions are fought out by sportsmen of international fame. As mentioned above, the climax of all winter sporting entertainments ever held here will be the Olympiad in February next.

Any who may be desirous to evade a winter altogether may board the Misoxer Railway or the Bernina Railway for a journey to Upper Italy or may travel through the indescribable charms of the Gotthard landscapes to Lugano, or may start from Brig-Domodossola on the Centovalli Railway for Locarno, to pass the winter in the clemency of a perfect spring climate.

Other countries besides Switzerland possess winter resorts provided with all necessary equipment for sport and recreation; but none show such wealth and variety of Alpine life in which for many months in succession the winter holds supreme sway with a constant covering of deep snow and radiant sunshine. No country on earth possesses so many places for winter sport and winter cure at an altitude of over 1000 meters amidst a gigantic mountain world, and no country has by unremitting labour perfected all equipment needed for a true enjoyment of a mountain winter to the extent that Switzerland has done. Ever since Europe began to recover from the economic consequences of the War, Switzerland has resumed its old position as an international centre of winter recreation and enjoyment.

Dr. Willy Ruppel.