

The story of British ski-ing

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The story of British ski-ing

It is possible that the first skis ever introduced into Switzerland were those which were presented by a passing Norwegian in the winter of 1883 to the monks of St. Bernard. None the less the English may claim to have been among the first to popularise the sport in the Swiss Alps. In 1890 Mr. Knoker introduced ski-ing into Meiringen and in 1888 Colonel Napier brought a pair of skis from Norway to Davos. "Colonel Napier" writes Dame Katharine Furse, "had a Norwegian manservant whose use of the ski gave rise to many myths. It was even said that he skied down from the chalet to the hotel carrying a tea-tray on his shoulder."

In 1891 another Englishman, Mr. Gerald Fox, introduced skis into Grindelwald. In March 1894 the brothers Branger of Davos guided the late Sir Arthur Conan Doyle on some fine ski tours around Davos, which were described in the Strand Magazine. They took place exactly a year after the crossing of the Prugel Pass by the late Colonel Iselin, a British ski-runner. The Prugel was the first Alpine pass crossed on skis. In the winters of 1901 and 1902 the brothers E. C. and C. W. Richardson visited Davos. They founded the Davos English Ski Club, the oldest of the British ski clubs, in 1903. A little later in the same year the Ski Club of Great Britain was born.

Many of the ski-ing centres in Switzerland were "opened" for the first time in winter by the Public Schools Alpine Sports Club, which discovered the ski-ing possibilities of Adelboden, Morgins, Villars, Mürren, Wengen and other centres.



In Switzerland the many lakes form splendid rinks in winter

The Ski Club of Great Britain now numbers over 4000 members. The British have to go abroad to ski. As a result we are hopelessly outnumbered by continental ski-runners, for whereas ski-ing in Switzerland, Germany and Austria is a democratic sport which has been taken up with enthusiasm by all classes, with us ski-ing is a sport for the minority who can afford a winter holiday in Switzerland. Many of our ski-runners only enjoy a fortnight's ski-ing in the year. Consequently they have to work hard and concentrate into that fortnight's ski-ing as rapid an improvement as possible. Among the factors which have contributed to raising the general average of British ski-ing, not the least important are the British ski tests, which have now been in existence for some twenty-five years. Every winter about four hundred tests are passed. These tests give our members something definite to aim at, with the result that the average standard of ski-ing among British runners is, I think, as high as in any other country.

The British were the first to develop and to organize downhill ski racing. Continental countries adopted the Norwegian type of langlauf race, which is an excellent test of endurance and of the specialised technique necessary for running at great speeds along the level and uphill, but bears no relation to the technique of downhill ski-running as developed in Alpine countries.

The British fought for years for the official recognition of downhill races and slalom races, and their efforts were crowned with success at the International Ski Congress which met at Oslo in 1930. The Ski Congress recognised rules which were very similar to the

The luxurious "Suvretta-House" at St. Moritz is a model of the comfort found in Swiss Hotels





Wherever there is not a lake the town or the hotels construct excellent rinks for their visitors

British Racing Rules and paid the Ski Club of Great Britain the great compliment of asking them to organize next winter the first International Downhill Racing Meeting. This Meeting will open at Mürren on February 19th.

The recognition of downhill races owes at least as much to the Swiss as to the British. The Schweizerische Akademische Ski-Club have always valiantly supported the British campaign and the first International Downhill Races of any importance were inaugurated between the Schweizerische Akademische Ski-Club and the British University Ski Club. There have been six of these annual university ski matches and the result may be described as satisfactory to both sides, both teams having won an equal number of these sporting and interesting events.

The British have on only one occasion been represented in the International Ski Championship Meeting. One meeting every winter is selected by the International Ski Federation as the most important of that winter, and to this meeting national clubs and associations send their best teams. We have not yet been in a position to enter langlaufers and jumpers. In the winter of 1928—1929 the Polish Ski Association organized in connection with the International Ski Championship a downhill race. For this event the British entered a Downhill Racing Team. Mr. Bracken, the Captain, only missed victory by two seconds and out of sixty competitors all the members of the British team were among the first twenty-four. The performance of Miss Doreen Elliott and Miss Audrey Sale-Barker coming in 14th and 15th respectively and beating no less than forty-four men competitors has been justly described as one of the most magnificent efforts in the history of sport.

A Swiss village in winter. The snow successfully defies the bright sunshine

The standard of ski-ing among British ladies is extra-ordinarily high. The Ladies' Ski Club has, so far, succeeded in beating the Swiss Ladies' Ski Club on every occasion on which they have met. Miss Doreen Elliott won the Ladies' Downhill Race at the Swiss Ski Championship Meeting last winter, and Miss Sale-Barker has won the Ladies' Arlberg-Kandahar against a thoroughly representative international entry.

Mountaineering on skis is becoming increasingly popular with British ski-runners. The first book to describe in detail the problems of snow-craft in relation to ski-ing was the work of an English ski-runner. The current issue of the British Ski Year Book contains an account of ski tours to the summits of Monte Rosa, the Dom, and many other great Alpine peaks, expeditions in the Himalayas, the Pyrenees, Japan, Norway and Sweden, undertaken by ski tourers and ski racers of our little community.

Moreover, mountaineering on skis, as we are gradually beginning to discover, is not really a winter sport. Spring is the best season for ski-mountaineering. There is an increasing number of Englishmen who go out to the Alps in spring-time and even during the summer for ski-mountaineering. Last August, for instance, some members of a club recently founded at Harrow carried out some magnificent ski tours above Zermatt, including a successful ascent of Monte Rosa. The current issue of the British Ski Year Book contains an account of some fine tours in the Oberland and Zermatt districts which were carried out as late as September.

I think that we are entitled to claim that all branches of British ski-ing are at the moment in a thoroughly healthy condition.

Arnold Lunn.

Pictures of Käthe Morell.

