

# How to avoid winter sports : ...a hazardous occupation personally expounded by George Mikes

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Corot eigen ist die Intensität der Empfindung, die in all seinen Werken zum Ausdruck kommt, in den frühen kristallklaren Landschaften aus der späteren Zeit. Das gleiche gilt von den flüchtigen Darstellungen, die im 19. Jahrhundert kaum beachtet wurden und heute zu den gesuchtesten Werken gehören. Corot hat verschiedentlich in der Schweiz gemalt, in Genf vor allem, im Freiburgischen (Dekorationen im Schloß Greyerz) und auch im Berner Oberland. W.

Die Ausstellung dauert vom 23. Januar bis 13. März.

Le Musée des beaux-arts de Berne prépare une exposition des œuvres de Corot.

Une centaine de toiles et de dessins, ainsi que la plupart des gravures du maître, témoignent du talent de ce grand nom de la peinture paysagiste française du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle.

Né en 1796, de père français et de mère suisse, Corot occupe une place de choix parmi les peintres de son temps. Son œuvre résulte, en effet, des influences des trois principaux courants qui animent la peinture du siècle dernier — classicisme, romantisme, réalisme — sans que Corot se soit, toutefois, exclusivement voué à l'une ou l'autre de ces tendances. Il reste fortement engagé à l'égard de la tradition (Poussin, Lorrain), mais s'annonce d'ores et déjà comme précurseur de certaines tendances à l'impressionnisme. Dans son œuvre s'affirme toujours cette sensibilité extraordinaire qui lui est propre; elle se manifeste aussi bien dans les œuvres de jeunesse qui frappent par une pureté cristalline, que dans l'atmosphère des œuvres de maturité transparente encore, mais comme réchauffée par les leurs d'un sol rouge et ocre. Ses portraits qui, au XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle, ne trouvaient que de très rares amateurs, comptent, aujourd'hui, parmi les toiles les plus recherchées. — Corot a passé une partie de sa vie en Suisse, à Genève, notamment, au pays de Fribourg (peintures décoratives du château de Gruyères) et dans l'Oberland bernois.

L'exposition ouvrira ses portes le 23 janvier 1960 et durera jusqu'au 13 mars.

1. Zingara au Tambour de Basque  
Collection privée, Paris
2. Villeneuve-lès-Avignon, 1836  
Collection privée, Paris
3. Le qual des Paquis à Genève  
Musée d'art et d'histoire, Genève
4. Dunkerque, vue sur un bassin de pêche  
Collection privée, Suisse
5. Nymphé couchée dans la campagne  
Musée d'art et d'histoire, Genève

Mr. George Mikes, author of such hilariously satirical books as "How to be an Alien", "How to Scrape Skies", "Honey and Flowers", has eventually turned the spotlight of his good-natured slander on the Great Winter Sports Craze. No reader with at least a tinge of humour in his way of viewing things will bear Mr. Mikes a grudge for HIS way of viewing an almost sacred aspect of the Swiss Alps at the Peak of the Winter Season—the general urge of doing as everybody else does. Well, HE certainly tries to keep out of it, although, as he puts it somewhat guiltily, "a vague suspicion often creeps into my mind that perhaps they are right and I am

## How to Avoid Winter Sports

Whenever I go to Switzerland in the winter, my chief problem is how to avoid winter sports. It is not an easy task. Dangers lurk in every corner. In November or so, the whole country is transformed into one vast—well, not so terribly vast—ski-run, and few of your kind and hospitable Swiss friends seem able to grasp that your main purpose in life is not to run down a mountain slope at fifty miles an hour as if you were a sixty-horse-power motor-car with faulty brakes.

The railways cease to carry any other goods but skis; and the countryside is transformed into a white infinity, broken only by ski-lifts, carrying small, blue figures and their strange equipment.

Whoever is not actually ski-ing, has just finished ski-ing or is just about to go out ski-ing—and that applies to the ski-lift operator, the railway conductor, the waiter in your hotel and also to that elderly chamber-maid who you thought could hardly walk. You were right. She can hardly walk; but she can ski.

Those few people who are not ski-ing are busy skating, tobogganing, mountaineering, curling or are out on a run of ski-joring.

If I am so keen to avoid winter sports, the reader might not unreasonably ask, why do I go to Switzerland in winter? The answer is that I usually have some other business to attend to; secondly, I love Switzerland in the winter, just as in any other season; thirdly, I am

wrong". Sorry, for reasons of space it has not been possible to reprint Mr. Mikes' complete story such as it appeared in a recent issue of the British magazine "Good Housekeeping". Missing is the perfectly delightful part in which the author tells those "still determined to ski" what they are to do, "as being unable to do something myself has never deterred me from giving advice and instruction to others". Missing also are some of Mr. Mikes' spicily remarks on the old-fashioned and new-fangled ways of "outdoing the man who sits next to you at supper". If you can't beat him on the downhill runs you need not despair. "There is always

... a hazardous occupation personally expounded by George Mikes

addicted to my own private winter sport, that is: to avoid ski-ing. Believe me, it needs much more determination and skill not to ski in Switzerland than to ski.

My aversion to ski-ing is purely personal. I am not too much of a duffer in sports which depend largely on one's hands (such as tennis, golf, boxing, or preferably darts, table-tennis and billiards) but I am utterly and ridiculously hopeless in all sports in which you have to rely on your feet. Ever since my earliest youth I have been at war with my feet—and my feet have always won. They have defeated me regularly. For eleven years I went skating; one day my younger brother joined me and I was deeply moved to see that after one single afternoon's practice he was a much better skater than I was after eleven years. That was the end of my career on ice. Or rather the end of it, with the exception of curling. Curling is a game the Swiss play in a breather between a giant slalom and a round on skates, or whenever they can spare a little time between tobogganing and joring. The game consists of pushing two metal hot-water bottles about on the ice—a pastime which rather suits my skill and temperament. Further than that I am not prepared to go.

When thousands and tens of thousands of people do one thing and I alone do another, a vague suspicion often creeps into my mind that perhaps they are right and I am wrong.

ski-joring, a sport which has taken enormous strides in the last decade. In olden days, not too ferocious Swiss horses pulled people on skis across the ice at Arosa and St. Moritz. Then the American GIs arrived on the scene after the war and motorized this sport in no time, by using jeeps and lorries. Even this, however, was soon found too dull. So nowadays they are experimenting with ordinary aeroplanes: the plane runs on the ice and you hang on behind. Should it take off, do not forget to let go the ropes. Even the tougher kind of sportsman finds it a little irksome crossing Switzerland hanging from a plane." — So here we go:

But not in this case. I am sure my winter sports are better—and more pleasant—than theirs. Because, in addition to curling—that fascinating game of billiards with hot-water bottles and avoiding ski-ing—my own favourite winter sport in Switzerland is eating.

I am no drunkard, but I love Swiss soups. No one who has tasted a variety of Swiss soups will be astonished by this statement, because he will know that the Swiss love putting kirsch—a kind of cherry brandy—in everything they eat, particularly their soups. Many good people get roaring drunk on Swiss soups before they know what has hit them. And in a popular Swiss winter resort I once saw a patriotic Englishman get to his feet, raise his soup plate and call out in a loud voice: "Ladies and Gentlemen: the Queen!" Swiss food, on the whole, is good and healthy, but, I think, the Swiss cuisine cannot compete with the finesse of the French. I am, however, one of the greatest living connoisseurs in sausages, which I regard as one of the supreme creations of the human race. Now the Austrians and the Bavarians are no mean sausage nations by any standards, but the Swiss excel them all, by virtue of a giant sausage called the schublig. What Shakespeare is among writers, the schublig is among sausages. A nation which gave the schublig to undeserving humanity is a nation of giants, and must be forgiven anything, including its winter sports.