

"Ibex restored to Swiss Alps" [continued]

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federation. These corporations, farmers' guilds and partnerships, worked well, and some are still in existence today, such as for instance the corporation for the precious water irrigation system, so necessary in the Valais with the very low rainfall.

Wandering through these remote villages, you find the wooden farmsteads have a blockhouse-like appearance standing on wooden piles, whereas the graneries are distinguished by the circular stone slabs supporting them. In the Valais not an inch is lost in cultivating the soil wherever possible, and the sure-footed cattle graze upland on steep and remote pasture land. Down the plain of the river Rhone, apricots, asparagus, strawberries, peaches, pears and apples are grown in profusion, although these cultivations have only flourished during the last half-century. On the slopes above this plain are extensive and century-old vineyards. In the last two decades the productions increased from eight to over thirty million litre. The mountain farmer lives a simple, almost primitive life, he is constantly harassed by a serious struggle for existence and his sons and daughters often work in factories down the plain to make ends meet. When seasons change he also changes his place of residence, moving to his land in the high mountains, and coming down towards the plain as winter approaches. Often he changes his habitation as much as three times during the year, following the seasons up or down the mountainsides.

(To be continued.)

"IBEX RESTORED TO SWISS ALPS"

(Continued)

Some more methodical attempts were then made under the auspices of the Swiss League for the Protection of Nature, which is now responsible for the whole scheme. The animals were at first acclimatised in the lower regions, in special breeding grounds, before being transported in the higher mountains. There were some failures, but as the years passed the rearing of young ibex was improved and in the end all the settlements were more or less successful.

For instance, the 19 ibex released in 1920 in the National Park, in the Engadine, had increased to 170 in 1949, but of 15 settled on Piz d'Aela in 1914 none was left a few years later. A further attempt at settling them on Piz-d'Alea was more successful and last year there were 15 ibex in that district.

There are now altogether 11 settlements districts whose total herd grew from 1129 animals in 1949 to 1220 at the end of 1952. The smallest

herd is that of the Justistal (Berne), with 10 animals, while the biggest, totalling 500 ibex, is on Piz Albris, in the Engadine. There are now 30 ibex on the Graue Horner (St. Gallen), from 40 to 50 on the Schwarzer Monch and the Engelhörner (Berne), 150 on the Augsmatthorn (Berne), 160 (a decrease of 10, these having presumably migrated to the Piz Albris district) in the National Park, 260 on Mont Pleureur (Valais).

The Piz Albris settlement is the most prosperous. Its herd increased from 480 to 500 between 1949 and 1952. Anyone climbing on the slopes of Piz Languard, near Pontresina, can easily see ibex roaming among the rocks, and sometimes they even come as low as the Morteratsch glacier. The Swiss League for the Protection of Nature has already devoted a sum of over £20,500 to the settlement of ibex, and its efforts and sacrifices have already not been fruitless.

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