

Switzerland 1965 - year of the Alps

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SWITZERLAND 1965 — YEAR OF THE ALPS EXHIBITION IN LONDON

An exhibition of mountaineering in the Alps is being held at the Ceylon Tea Centre, 22 Regent Street, London S.W.1, until 19th February. The exhibition is presented by the Swiss National Tourist Office in collaboration with the Alpine Club and the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club to commemorate the first ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865 and other achievements by British climbers.

The Exhibition was formally opened by Mrs. W. E. M. Blandy, daughter of Edward Whymper and herself an accomplished mountaineer, on 3rd February. Mr. A. Kunz, Manager of the Swiss National Tourist Office in London, welcomed the guests, and the Swiss Ambassador who was present with Madame de Fischer and several members of the Swiss Embassy, addressed the gathering.

The exhibition is a most interesting display of photographs, panoramic views, relics and mementoes.

It is an optical illusion of course — thirty feet of snow-covered mountains is a lot to expect in a small room in London. Made from eight panels each forty inches wide and set forty-five inches apart at an acute angle of forty-five degrees, the whole gives the effect of a vast, wide, endless expanse of white snow-capped mountains.

In the middle of the room, in glass-domed cases lie some of the exhibits, many of them brought from museums and loaned by the Alpine Club.

In the first case are miscellaneous letters from Edward Whymper — one of them showing his signature. There is a small dainty portrait of his mother, Elizabeth, and a water colour of Whymper at the age of 68 painted by his sister-in-law Alice Whymper, also a medal — the Order of St. Maurice and Lazarus — which was awarded to Whymper by Victor Emmanuel of Italy in recognition of the value of his books. There is also displayed a first edition of his famous book "The Scrambles among the Alps" and two subsequent editions "Travels among the Alps" and "The Ascent of the Matterhorn".

In the second glass case are photographs of the Swiss Mountain guides of that period. Beside them are some of their guide books — rarities among the old diaries of that time. In those days a mountain guide's book was called a Führer-book. It contained a complete record of each climb, how it was made, how many people, and how much the guide received for his labours. It was the old equivalent of a passport. Without one, no-one could be an official guide to the mountains. All the guide books on display are originals and all are kindly loaned by courtesy of the Alpine Club.

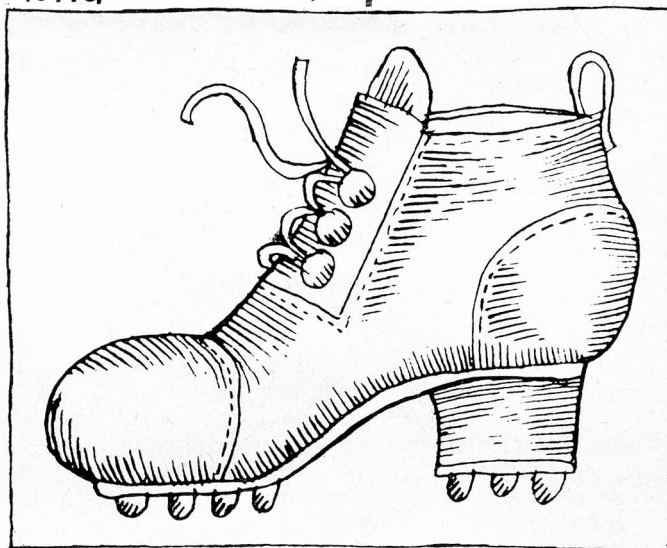
The third case contains some of Whymper's letters, a letter from Taugwalder the Elder, and letters of A. G. Girdlestone, W. A. G. Coolidge, fragments of rock taken from the Matterhorn after the accident in 1865 and a small piece of the Finsteraarhorn. Included too, are press cuttings from "The Times" which show the public outrage concerning mountaineering. Even Queen Victoria thought there should be a law against it. A. W. Moore's scrap-book is shown. It contains some of the earliest known actual climbing pictures. Crisp and clear, they could have been taken only yesterday. There is a telegram also from Lady Queensbury, mother of the ill-fated Lord Francis Douglas. Also on show are some of Martin Conway's pictures of the year.

Among the exhibits around the room are Ulrich Almer's impression of a climber holding up three men after a fall on the snow cornice in 1887. There are some splendid pictures of mountains being scaled in recent years. Walton's sketch of the famous Matterhorn in 1866 is there too, and Doré's famous Ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865 and the Fall from the Matterhorn. Included too are many photographs actually taken at that period including pictures of the original seven who achieved their aim — the Matterhorn — with such triumph and tragedy. Last, but not least, all those interested in photography will delight to see Donkin's wonderful pictures of the Alps. All were taken long before the turn of the century. He himself died in 1888.

Around the walls of the room between the panorama lie relics from a hundred years ago: the skis, the early crampons, the walking sticks with intricate carved heads, the snow lanterns, binoculars, telescope, snow plank — the forerunner of skis — snow shoes, skis and snow shoes combined, ski stick in two halves and a drinking cup.

The exhibition is open Monday to Friday 10 a.m. to 6.30 p.m. and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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Exhibition
1965 - Year of the Alps
at the Tea Centre, London S.W.1
4th - 19th February