

Switzerland 1965 - the year of the alps

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SWITZERLAND 1965 — THE YEAR OF THE ALPS

*Exhibition in London ...*

Since the first half of the nineteenth century, the Alps have become a haven of beauty to the nature lover, a challenge to the adventurer and a playground for the winter-sports enthusiast. Before then, they were considered by most Swiss as an enemy which hurled down torrents, stones and avalanches. There were many stories about the dragons which inhabited the Alps, even the guide books carried detailed descriptions and warnings about them. Many fearsome legends were woven around the peaks. Tales of death and of the evil spirits that haunted them.

Indeed, as recently as two hundred years ago, no one was willing to risk his life by making the first ascent of Mont Blanc (15,781 ft. — the highest in the Alps) to win a prize offered by the famous Swiss naturalist, Horace Benedict de Saussure. The prize went begging for twenty-six years. Then a crystal hunter Jacques Balmat and a physician, Michael Paccard made the attempt and were able to claim the reward.

Still, for a long while few people seemed to think of climbing for the joy of reaching the top. Eighteenth

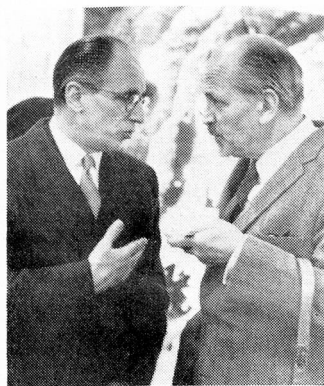
century travellers crossing the Alps sometimes requested blindfolds — not to avoid vertigo — but because their sense of harmony was offended by such wild irregularities in the earth's surface.

But the spark of adventure was kindled and glowed even brighter after 1854 when a Briton on honeymoon, Sir Alfred Wills, pitted himself against the particular difficult Wetterhorn (12,166 ft.). Other Englishmen accepted similar challenges. The Golden Age of mountaineering had begun. The Alps became fashionable by 1855. The descriptive pens of the mid-Victorian writers flowed with alpine enthusiasm. During the next sixteen years, the undaunted British climbed every one of the principal summits and this YEAR OF THE ALPS will unfold many of the adventures and conquests over the years. Some hidden quirk of Anglo-Saxon temperament seems to have been waiting for the call of the high mountains. For British climbers are largely responsible for the development of mountaineering.

One of the most exciting chapters in the history of mountaineering was Edward Whymper's ascent of the Matterhorn a hundred years ago. In the winter of 1865, too, the first adventuresome souls from England decided to spend their holidays in the wintertime and spend them — of all places — amid Switzerland's cold and snowy mountains at St. Moritz. During the same year, Davos received its first winter guests from Germany, and thus the development of winter-sports holidays began.

*Mrs. W. E. M. Blandy and Miss N. Blandy receive an Alpine Stick to help their ascent of the stairs.**... in February.*

To mark the centenary of these exciting events, Switzerland decided to call 1965 THE YEAR OF THE ALPS. As we have already reported in an earlier issue, an exhibition was held at the Ceylon Tea Centre in Regent Street, London, from 4th to 19th February, in collaboration with the Alpine Club and the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club. Besides the beauty of the Alps, portrayed in a 30-ft. panorama, relics and documents of early mountaineering, including items relating to Whymper's first ascent of the Matterhorn, early books and articles and also recent publications on mountaineering in the Alps were displayed.



*The Swiss Ambassador
Monsieur B. de Fischer
in conversation with
Dr. H. W. Egli.*



*English tea and Swiss
"Wähen" — another sign
of the friendship between
our two countries.*

The exhibition was formally opened by the daughter of Edward Whymper, Mrs. W. E. M. Blandy, on 3rd February, when these pictures were taken, kindly put at our disposal by the Swiss National Tourist Office in London.

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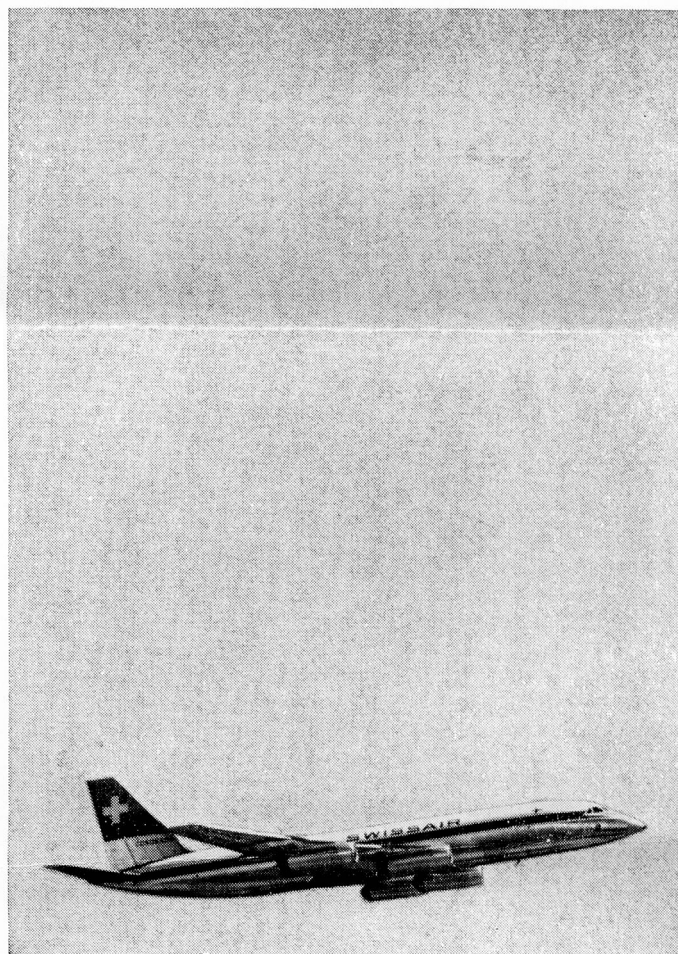
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