Switzerland in the UK

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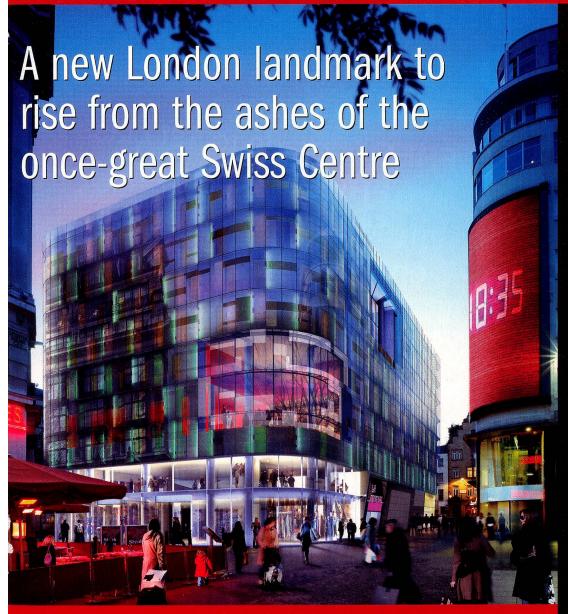
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SWITZEILENC in the UK



It has taken more than a year of detailed negotiations with Westminster City planners, but finally permission has been given for the demolition of the famous Swiss Centre building in Leicester Square and replacing it with an eye-catching ninestory complex containing a 228 bedroom hotel, restaurants, casino, shops and luxury flats.

But its main feature, certainly as far as visitors to the West End are concerned, will be its second skin of frameless glass, wrapped round the entire outer wall of the building.

By day this skin has a very practical function, capturing the warmth of the sun but also controlling ventilation to the rooms.

But at night it completely transforms the building. Behind the random pattern of translucent, frosted glass, coloured lights hidden in the facade gradually come to life, making the whole building glow. The colour and intensity of the light can be

constantly varied, depending on the time of day or to combine with some special occasion in Leicester Square itself. Or, as architects Jestico and Whiles put in, "adapting to the vibrancy of the area's night life."

Leicester Square itself it to be completely renovated by Westminster City Council, with improvements made to the street lighting, seating, paving and landscaping. There will also be a stage for open air performances.

The new owners of the Swiss Centre, the Irish developers McAleer & Rushe, intend to start demolition this autumn and the new building could be finished and in use by 2009.

It is not yet known whether it will be given a name that relates to its Swiss antecedents, or whether its only link will be its proximity to the Glockenspiel, to be re-erected in nearby Swiss Court, which we illustrated in our last issue.

Zermatt's thanks



In the shadow of the mighty Matterhorn, a warm tribute for the British pioneers who 150 years ago conquered the Alps. Read about it on Page 3.

Jeffrey's triumph



It lasted 39 days and covered 1,000 km. but Jeffrey Long fulfilled his ambition of walking from London to Lausanne. See Page 8 for full story.

Painter's puzzle



A Swiss artist wanted to create a unique outdoor work of art – but needed a team of alpinists to help him achieve it. Read about it on Page 5.



The magazine for Swiss living and





Switzerland in the UK has its own Internet site, continually bringing you up to the minute news of the latest events as well as major stories from the most recent issues and links to other interesting sites in both the UK and Switzerland. To access it go to: www.swissreview.co.uk

News about forthcoming events of interest to our readers should be emailed to: editor@meakin.net



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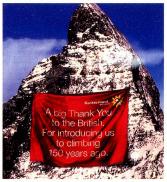


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news in brief

- The Swiss pay higher insurance premiums than anywhere else in the world, says the Swiss Assurance Association. The average cost is Sfr. 6,900 a year, of which Sfr. 3,820 is for life insurance.
- A Swiss motorist committing a road traffic offence in the UK - or any other country - will not automatically have his Swiss driving licence withdrawn, as has been the case for the last 40 years, according to a decision by the Federal Tribunal in Lausanne.
- Researchers report that cancer survival rates in the UK are worse than any other Western European country except Denmark, while Switzerland has the highest rates.

Zermatt's thanks to UK for pioneering alpinism



The giant ad in the Daily Telegraph said it all: "A big Thank You to the British for introducing us to climbing 150 years ago."

It appeared as more than 300 members of The Alpine Club including some of the most famous names in the history of climbing converged on Zermatt for the 150th birthday of the world's oldest climbing club.

Most of them were British, and many in their eighties. They heard Jürg Schmid, head of Switzerland Tourism, say how grateful the Swiss were for the British pioneers of the golden age of mountaineering between 1854 and 1865 who first brought tourism to the Alps.

"During this period," he said, "there were 39 first ascents of the most impressive Swiss peaks - 31 of them by brave British climbers guided by brave Swiss guides.

"Their adventures thrilled all of Europe. Then in 1863 an inspired Briton called Thomas Cook organised the first escorted tour to Switzerland - the beginning of modern tourism.

"Those pioneers often stayed for a whole season. Today's visitors stay, on average for 2.8 days. But last year the British registered 3 million overnight stays."

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How to contact the editor

Reports of Swiss society activities and coming events, and articles and correspondence for the 'Switzerland in the UK' section of the Swiss Review, should go to the editor:

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Jeffrey Long 30 Finsbury Drive Bradford BD2 1QA Tel/fax: 01274 588 189.

 The 'Switzerland in the UK' supplement appears four times a year. The deadline for the next issue containing UK news, to be distributed in February 2008, is December

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In the second part of his reminiscences, BEAT WEHREN tells of the last years in the sorry history of what once were the most popular restaurants in London's West End

The final, unhappy years of the iconic Swiss Centre restaurants

It was in 1975, while working in Regensdorf, that I was approached by the General Manager of Swiss Centre Restaurants and lured back to London with my whole family.

Things had not changed much, although customers were no longer queueing around the block to get a meal.

However after a short time, as Executive Chef, I was again on top of the London picking order. The shock waves of the dismissal of the General Manager, due to whatever reason, rippled on for some time until the introduction of an English national as his successor. Yes, he was married to a Swiss wife and I was told his father-in-law owned three quarters of St Moritz.

This new setup certainly did not contribute to an easy working relationship of the management team. Picking on each other was once again more important than getting on with the job.

Did any among our management, guests or the members of the City Swiss Club who were complaining most bitterly about this slap in the face of the Swiss hospitality industry support me in my opposition to this? No chance!

Some in the City Swiss Club who never talked to me before, sought my participation in plotting against this appointment, but were careful not to show their own true colours.

The club, for example, often celebrating in the Swiss Centre Restaurants, never bothered to congratulate the team or send a token of appreciation to the kitchen staff. Rubbing shoulders with us chefs was obviously not the thing to do.

After a short time as Executive Chef, I was able to establish a forceful galley team and motivate them to achieve levels in guest satisfaction not experienced before at the Swiss Centre Restaurants.

Guests used to queue up to three hours around the block in order to get a seat, even Swiss nationals, brandishing their passports.

Fay Mashler in the Evening Standard described Swiss Centre Restaurants as gastronomically on the same level as the Michelin Star graced Terrace Restaurant of the Dorchester Hotel and the Ritz. During this time, I also had the pleasure of redesigning the production area and its subsequent refurbishment at a cost of £1.8 million.

One reason for this huge expense was that the kitchen floor was no longer waterproof and that "tomato

sauce" had dripped onto the limousine of one of the executives with parking privileges.

Asking whether we should build a production unit somewhere else and open up a few more restaurants, I was told by the Director to concentrate on my kitchen and not on the business as such. The result of his views is now obvious.

Yes, this was just at the beginning of the creation of the great TV chefs and certainly none of the Swiss Centre Restaurants' executive directors thought of a chef as a valuable cog in the system.

I left at the top of the wave at the end of 1981, only to observe that with the ongoing struggle between Mövenpick, Swiss Bank Corporation, Swissair and the other interested parties, the whole operation went to the dogs or even worse, turned into one of Mövenpick's Marché restaurants.

Once again the resident General

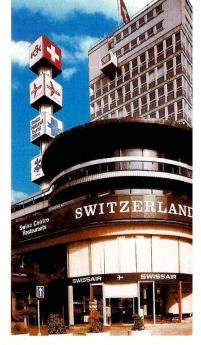
Manager ended up in disgrace and the whole operation was shut down.

On my subsequent work around the world I met several of my former team, and while submerging ourselves in the past glory – and gory – all of them assured me that they never in their lives worked as hard as during their and my time as Executive Chef at the Swiss Centre Restaurants. But equally, and more importantly, never again had so much fun working.

Most of them reached top positions in business or started their own ventures.

In its original concept the Swiss Centre and Swiss Centre Restaurants was certainly a genial creation, but it crash landed as a result of typical Swiss infighting – not unsimilar to the unfocused management of many top Swiss companies involved in it.

Even today Cornell University in Ithaca, USA, lectures that those very Swiss companies, which once were



quoted as example of excellence, are now used as an example of total failure and mismanagement. Yes – a sorry story indeed!

• In the next issue of Switzerland in the UK we reveal the hitherto untold story of how the Swiss Centre itself, hailed as the proud showplace of Swiss culture, business and tourism, was allowed to disintegrate and become the empty shell it is today.

Spot the ellipses: Swiss artist and team of mountain climbers create an eye-catching puzzle to really mystify the Welsh

Visitors to the Cardiff Bay Barrage to see what they'd been told was a remarkable work of public art could well be found scratching their heads in bewilderment.

For the sight that greets them is a series of bold yellow curves painted on the locks, gates and even the outer sea wall that seem to make no sense – until you stand in a certain position and all is finally revealed.

"From virtually every angle all you see are odd splashes of colour," says the city's arts and regeneration agency, which commissioned the work.



Felice Varini, and paintbrush, in action



Then it adds, enthusiastically: "But on closer inspection you are treated to a remarkable visual spectacle on discovering three perfectly formed yellow ellipses which create a powerful piece of public art."

It's all the work of Swiss artist Felice Varini, together with a team of professional mountain climbers who were called it to take their brushes and paintpots to tackle the more inaccessible places.

It coincided with the appointment of Ruth Thomas-Lehmann as Wales' first honorary consul and the opening of a Swiss consulate in Cardiff.

The opening was announced at a ceremony at the Welsh Senedd when Swiss Ambassador Alexis Lautenberg was greeted by First Minister Rhodri Morgan and Presiding Officer Lord Ellis Thomas.

Ambassador Lautenberg said the consulate would serve more than just the Swiss community in Wales.

"It will act as a conduit between the two nations, promoting trade, investment, tourism, academic and cultural relationships," he said.

The new consul was born in Zurich, grew up in Basle and moved to London to study English, where she met and married a young law student. He is now chairman of the Cardiff employment tribunal.



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Here today - gone tomorrow

Swiss in Scotland have been surprised to learn that less than two years after he arrived in Scotland, Consul General Bruno Widrig is to leave. He opened the country's first Swiss Consulate General, in Edinburgh, in May, 2006. During his brief stay in the country he established close links with members of the Scottish government, as well as with the Swiss community in Scotland.

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Marathon man completes epic

1,000km walk

British ex-servicemen now living in Switzerland gathered on the steps of the world famous Olympic museum in Lausanne to greet marathon walker Jeffrey Long when he arrived at the end of his 1.000km trek from London.

The Royal British Legion, which Jeffrey's sponsors were supporting, has a little known but very active Swiss branch, with 175 members.

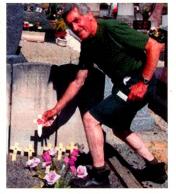
Jeffrey's walk, which took him 39 days, was at a time when both France and Switzerland were buffeted by unprecedented storms, but he still managed to complete up to 23 miles a day.

On Day 5, when he crossed the English Channel by ferry, he still insisted on pacing the deck during the 20 mile crossing.

His heavy backpack included a tent which he used on several nights when there were no hotels on his route. At one village he came across the grave of a British aircrew shot down during the war, and planted a wooden cross (see picture).

Thousands of well wishers kept up to date with his progress by reading daily reports on the Swiss Review web site.

Back at his home in Bradford, nursing sore feet, Jeffrey said: "Despite the atrocious weather it has been a most a stimulating



experience. I would like to thank all the people who supported and sponsored me, which made it all well worth while."



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