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The flying photographer



Walter Mittelholzer beside the Fokker on the Kilimanjaro flight, 15 December 1929 to 28 February 1930

Walter Mittelholzer, son of a baker from St. Gallen, did an apprenticeship as a photographer. Then he became a military and civilian pilot and ultimately a great pioneer in aviation. Throughout his life he combined flying with photography. In 1926 he flew together with a geologist, a mechanic and the writer René Gouzy by seaplane from Zurich to Cape Town. The flight, an adventurous undertaking, took 76 days. Mittelholzer documented each leg photographically – and sent the photos while underway to newspapers and magazines in Switzerland. As co-founder of Swissair in 1931, he became a national hero.

The exhibition "The Flying Photographer" about Mittelholzer can be seen at the Swiss National Museum in Zurich until 7 October 2018. www.landesmuseum.ch. The ETH Library preserves the photographic legacy of Mittelholzer. More than 18,000 pictures are available online. <http://ba.e-pics.ethz.ch>



Portrait of a barber in Marrakesh, taken on the Lake Chad flight, 1930–31



The North Face of the Eiger at a height of 3,800 metres, taken in 1919; and sand dunes of the Sahara, taken in 1930.



Mittelholzer personally delivered a decommissioned Swissair plane to the emperor of Ethiopia, Haile Selassie (1934).



Road bridge in Pérolles near Fribourg, taken in 1926



The pyramids of Gizeh, taken on the Kilimanjaro flight, 1929–30