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NEWS FROM SWITZERLAND



FESTIVE BEGINNING TO "THE YEAR OF THE ALPS"

St. Moritz.—"In 60 million years the Alps will be worn away—so let's make the most of the time that's left!" This was one of the many references to "The Year of the Alps" at the recent international press conference held by the Swiss National Tourist Office in St. Moritz, where there was a simultaneous celebration of the centennial of the arrival of the first winter guests in that now-famous resort town.

What's the point of celebrating the Alps, if they will still be around for another 60 million years? The celebration has primarily historical roots: 1965 marks the first centennial of St Moritz, Davos and Villars as winter resorts, and the 100th anniversary of the first successful climbing of the Matterhorn.

And so an attempt is being made to impress more people with the climatic and geographic attractions of the Alps, their beneficial effects on modern man's body and spirit, and their excellence as a unique region for rejuvenation and the enjoyment of nature.

As Dr Werner Kampfen, Director of the Swiss National Tourist Office, declared at the press conference: "In the coming "Year of the Alps," anyone interested in building up his health by partaking of the very special atmosphere which the Alps offer, can celebrate his own personal festival — a festival of health and rejuvenation."

SWISSAIR BREAKS A NEW RECORD

At the beginning of November, a DC-8 belonging to Swissair covered the distance from Zurich to New York in 7 hours and 14 minutes. Taking into consideration the time difference between Switzerland and the east coast of the United States, the plane, which was flying at an altitude of over 35,000 feet, averaged a cruising speed of 575 m.p.h. The previous record, made in 1961, was 7 hours and 35 minutes. (OSEC).

CONSTRUCTION MACHINERY POOL FORMED

A construction machinery pool was recently created in Switzerland in the form of a co-operative society. The purpose of this group is to centralise supply and demand for the rental of large construction machinery, in this way ensuring a more rational use of existing machines and an optimum employment of all construction machinery, at the same time avoiding any risk of over-equipment.

The pool was created by a number of big Swiss civil engineering firms, in co-operation with a trust company, and is open to any Swiss public works firm.

THE "GREAT WORLD THEATRE" IN EINSIEDELN

Einsiedeln: — One of Europe's most splendid dramatic presentations is the production of "The Great World Theatre" by Don Pedro Calderon de la Barca, given every five years in Einsiedeln and performed on the town's monumental square before its world-famous church. A particularly lavish production of this best-known work of the Spanish poet and dramatist is currently in preparation for 1965. Under the direction of Swiss actor-director Erwin Kohlund, more than 700 performers—most of them local amateurs — have begun rehearsals for the play, which will feature music by Heirich Sutermeister. According to an advance statement, the play deals with "human life as it is played on the world's stage, success and failure, mortality and eternity." The performances will begin on June 19 and will be held every Wednesday and Saturday evening until September 18. From Zurich or Lucerne, the scene of the impressive performance is accessible in barely an hour by train or automobile.

SWITZERLAND'S MOST MODERN HOTEL

Zurich: — In the lakeside village of Horgen, only 15 minutes by auto from downtown Zurich, Switzerland's most modern hotel is now being built. With its 150 rooms, 150 baths and 280 beds, it will also be the largest hotel along the shores of Lake Zurich.

Called the "Seehotel Meierhof" (Lake-Hotel Meierhof), it takes its name from an inn which once occupied the same spot, and will be opened in the summer of 1965.

Among its facilities will be several bars and restaurants, a shopping centre, an all-year swimming pool, and a supper club with roof-garden and a splendid view over the lake and nearby mountains. The new structure is part of the ultra-modern town centre of Horgen currently under construction, the nucleus of which will be a 1000-seat convention hall.

A SWISS "MARKET" IN LONDON

A well attended press conference in Zurich furnished detailed information on the "Swiss Centre" under construction in London's business and amusement section and which is to be ready next year.

This joint venture of the Swiss National Tourist Office, Swissair, the Swiss Bank Corporation and the Swiss export industries is to be an 11-storey building.

Typical Swiss products and services will henceforth be featured not only during a short "Swiss Fortnight" but will be on show permanently. The purpose of advertising on a national level is being combined with conveniences recalling the picturesque setting of a medieval market place; characteristic Swiss restaurants and coffee shops grouped around a central market square will be an added attraction for the public.

AN ANNIVERSARY IN THE SWISS WATCHMAKING INDUSTRY

The famous Swiss watchmaking firm of Patek Philippe, in Geneva, recently celebrated the 125th anniversary of its foundation. The firm was the joint creation of an exiled Pole, Count Antoine de Patek, and a young French watchmaker, Adrien Philippe of Geneva, a town eminently favourable to the growth and success of a watchmaking concern.

Three years later, this firm revolutionized the watchmaking industry with its first invention: the keyless watch, and in 1851 at the inauguration of the Crystal Palace at the London Universal Exhibition, Patek Philippe won its first gold medal, to be followed by 19 others, awarded at international exhibitions.

Today, the firm employs 200 watchmakers and specialists, and manufactures 28 watches a day; this figure may seem small, but is not in actual fact, when one takes into consideration the great precision of high quality watches and the extreme care taken in their manufacture.

In addition, the firm's steady growth made it necessary to build a new factory, which has just been opened and is equipped with all the latest ultra-modern tools and plant. (OSEC).

MEMORIAL FOR A SWISS PIONEER

Brigue: — A ceremony recently held in Brigue, the Alpine turntable in the Rhone valley, and attended by Federal Councilor Roger Bonvin and other guests of honour from all parts of Switzerland was devoted to the memory of Dr Alexander Seiler, born a hundred years ago.

Named after his father who started the family's hotel business, Alexander jun. won considerable reputation in politics, as champion of tourism and supporter of many social and educational institutions and was known far beyond his home canton not only in Switzerland but also abroad. As member of the Federal Parliament, he initiated the idea of a national advertising office for tourism and in the following was named the first president of the Swiss National Tourist Office.

To him Zermatt owes its development to a world renowned resort. On the occasion of his 100th birthday, a memorial designed by the sculptor Hans Loretan was unveiled while the work of the great humanitarian is to be carried on by the "Dr Alexander Seiler Foundation" which is to devote itself entirely to the promotion of the interests and training of nurses.

THE MOTORIZATION OF SWISS AGRICULTURE

According to the Swiss Association of Farm Tractor Owners, the number of two-axled motor vehicles used for agricultural work in Switzerland amounted in 1963 to 63,000 (1961—54,000; 1962—59,000). (OSEC).

CHILDREN LEARN TO KNOW WILD ANIMALS

Zurich: — Where does the jaguar live and where is the home of the leopard? What is the difference between a camel and a dromedary?

Such and other questions are answered by "Wild Life," a game something like "Monopoly," originated by Peter Ryhiner, the Swiss big game specialist, in co-operation with the publishing house "Edition Carlit." The "World Wildlife Fund" and the director of the Zurich Zoo welcome this new game as a very appropriate means of implanting in the young generation the idea of worldwide protection of nature and wild life.

Peter Ryhiner, who has supplied a great number of zoos with the rarest of animals also wrote a book on his thrilling profession.

Due to the increasing danger of wild life being exterminated by organized safaris, catching wild animals alive has taken on a new and important significance. Today, animals about to be extinct can find a haven in the zoo where they feel quite at home, as has been repeatedly proven, and thus be preserved for future generations.

FIRM ENABLES ITS WORKERS TO BECOME SHAREHOLDERS

J. R. Geigy, in Basle, the well-known Swiss manufacturers of pharmaceutical products, chemicals and dyestuffs, have recently made changes in the structure of their shares, of great interest from the social point of view. First of all, by drawing on their reserves, they have raised the value of their shares from S. Fr. 750 to 800. In order to make these shares more easily negotiable, they have been divided into four equal parts worth S. Fr. 200 each.

In addition, the firm has carried out a second increase in its capital from 48 million francs to 51 million francs by issuing 15,000 new shares at S. Fr. 400, i.e. double the nominal value. The right to subscribe is exclusively reserved for the personnel, by means of a special fund, created for the purpose and designed to allow the staff to share in the additional benefits of the pension fund. All the firm's employees will therefore be entitled to become shareholders, provided they live and work in Switzerland and have been members of Geigy Ltd.'s pension fund for at least 4 years.

The shares can be purchased in four instalments of Fr. 100, the first after four years, the other three every two years. Consequently, at the end of 10 years' service, an employee will be able to possess a share worth between S. Fr. 5000 and 6000. These shares will be untransferable during the employee's period of service, but on retirement he will become sole owner of them, with all the rights involved. (OSEC).

SWITZERLAND'S CONTRIBUTION TO AGRICULTURAL TRAINING IN INDIA

The Swiss National Committee for the World Food Programme is planning to convert into a young farmers training centre the small agricultural school of Loka Niketan, situated in the north west of India, in the state of Guparat, a region almost entirely devoted to agriculture. The Swiss Government has decided to back this scheme with S.Fr. 300,000, drawn from the loan voted on February 1st, 1963, in favour of the World Food Programme, this loan itself being part of the 60 million francs set aside in 1961 for technical co-operation with countries in the process of development.

The Swiss Organisation for Aid to Foreign Countries has been put in charge of this scheme, which plans mainly to increase the capacity of the present school fourfold, in this way providing room for 300 pupils, most of them from poor peasant families.

While the Swiss National Committee for the World Food Programme provides half the total cost of expansion, estimated at S.Fr. 600,000, the running expenses as in the past will be covered by funds of entirely Indian origin. The famines that periodically threaten India make the development of agriculture in that country a problem of vital importance. (OSEC)

AN ELECTRONIC CLOCK IN GENEVA

A public electronic clock has just been installed on the Quai des Bergues in Geneva (Switzerland). It is only the third clock of this kind to be installed in the world; the first was on show at the New York World Fair and the second at the Swiss National Exhibition in Lausanne.

This electronic clock, manufactured by a well-known watchmaking firm in Geneva, has four dials indicating the time to the nearest tenth of a second, by means of neon tubes operated electronically; the mechanism is controlled by a quartz clock, with a daily precision exceeding one hundredth of a second.

The system in itself is not new, but the clock set up in Geneva is the first ever to be used to indicate the time to the public. (OSEC).

Laugh a little . . .

"It's not really all that bad," says the doctor to the worried husband, "about the nervous complaint of your wife's. With that complaint she may get to the ripe old age of a hundred."

"But—what about me?" asks the worried husband.

* * *

"My wife said to me that if I did not give up 'Jasse' she would leave me."

"Oh dear, that's bad."

"Yes, I shall surely miss her a little bit."