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LAUBERHORN SKI RACE IN DOUBT

The world famous ski race at the Lauberhorn near Lauterbrunnen in the Bernese Alps is in jeopardy. Because of diminishing snow falls, the organisers of this ski race intended to supplement the natural snow with man-made snow by installing some snow canons along the race track. However, they encountered stiff opposition from the ecologists who argued that the plan to create artificial snow did not contain adequate provisions for areas of some protected vegetation. The canons represented a threat to the ecology of the area. The ecologists' argument is very hard to understand since snow canons can be directed in such a way as to provide snow exactly where it is required whilst natural snow falls everywhere without regards to protected vegetation or not. So will over-zealous ecologists eventually try to ban natural snow falls as well?

COW DOPING

After the well known and long standing problems of doping of horses, athletes and other sports people, the latest scandal is now the doping of the famous fighting cows of the Wallis. As from now on, all cows participating in these old, traditional cow fights will be tested for dope. This is in response to some accusations dating back to 1994 when animal protection associations accused the cow breeders to dope their animals with amphetamines and alcohol. Through the anti-doping control, the breeders want to prove that their animals fight by instinct and need no dope to be able to perform.

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A REVOLUTIONARY TV SCREEN

The researchers of the Swiss Institute of Technology in Lausanne (EPFL) have developed a technique which is expected to result in the production of ultra-flat screens, just a few centimetres thick. Their discovery, made while studying the properties of carbon, was announced in the magazine "Science" and could herald a revolution in the screen industry. TV screens flat enough to hang on the wall, which until now existed only in science fiction, could become a reality by the year 2001. The newly patented electron gun which will make this revolution possible is itself expected to create quite a stir in the scientific and industrial community. Applying the process to television will be inexpensive, compared to the plasma technology behind the flat screens which the Japanese expect to launch on the market this year. The invention is not yet out of the laboratory, however. A major industrial partner still has to be found to ensure successful manufacturing and marketing. In the meantime, the three researchers in Lausanne - Walter de Heer, André Châtelain and Daniel Ugarte - plan to have a prototype ready within the next six months. Full commercialization is expected to take another five years, assuming there are no major hitches.

NEW LUCERNE NEWSPAPER

"NEUE LUZERNER ZEITUNG" is the name of the newspaper which has come into being following the merger of the "Luzerner Zeitung" and the "Luzerner Neueste Nachrichten". With a circulation of 125,000 copies, it is the fifth largest daily newspaper in Switzerland. Its circulation will also cover the cantons of Nidwald, Obwald, Schwyz, Uri and Glarus and, apart from Schwyz, it will also be the only daily newspaper in these cantons.

LORETAN CLIMBS "MOUNT LORETAN"

Erhard Lorétan (see article in the April 1996 Helvetia issue) has conquered another mountain, this time an un-named 4700 m high peak in the Antarctic. As he was the first person to climb that particular mountain, it is expected that the mountain will eventually be called "Mount Loretan". Lorétan had expected the climb to take some 20 hours, but thanks to his extraordinary fast climbing style, he was back at base camp within 11 hours. He prefers to climb solo since other climbers would only slow him down.

PAID HOLIDAYS

The Italians have over three times more paid holidays than the poor Japanese according to the statistics below:

| | | | |
|------------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|
| Italy | 35 days | The Netherlands | 32.5 days |
| Germany | 30 days | Switzerland | 28.5 days |
| Sweden, Denmark | 26.5 days | UK and France | 26.5 days |
| Portugal, Greece | 22 days | | |
| Ireland/Norway | 21 days | | |
| USA | 12 days | Japan | 11 days |

Wonder where this half a day comes in for various countries including Switzerland?

FUNNY POSTAL CHARGES

It is cheaper to send a postcard from Egypt to Switzerland than to send one within the country. A postcard dispatched from Davos to Zurich costs 70 Rp for a distance of 175 km. The same card sent from Cairo, 3000 km away, costs only 28 Rp. The same applies to postcards sent from the USA (46 Rp), the UK (54 Rp), Spain (57 Rp) and Germany (64 Rp). People in Basle who are notoriously quick on the uptake, have realised that they can save a lot of money by posting their postcards and letters from Germany back to Switzerland rather than post them in Basle itself.