

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 80 (2014)
Heft: [6]

Artikel: 150 years since the first Matterhorn ascent
Autor: Latham-Zurbruegg, Tanja
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943973>

Nutzungsbedingungen

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

Conditions d'utilisation

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

Terms of use

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

Download PDF: 02.04.2026

ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>

150 Years Since the first Matterhorn Ascent

By Tanja Latham-Zurbrugg



<http://www.zermatt.ch/en/matterhorn>

Triangular. A cragged rock “tooth” ranging into the heavens. Standing alone on the horizon. A magnet for alpinists, aesthetic emblem. Mountain with ideal proportions. Rugged rock with magical light. Playing in a sea of clouds and horizontal colouring.

In 2015, Zermatt celebrates the mountain of mountains. The Matterhorn is the focus of the 150th year jubilee. Throughout the year, events and festivities will mark the first ascent of the last four thousand-metre peaks in the alps. The Matterhorn is the tenth highest mountain in Switzerland and one of 48 Swiss peaks that is above 4,000 meters in height.

A story of victory and death

From 1857 onwards, several unsuccessful attempts were made to climb the Matterhorn, mostly from the Italian side. When Edward Whymper arrived in Valtournenche in July 1865, this was already his sixth summer season in the area. During the previous five summers, Whymper had failed to climb the mountain regarded as the King of the Alps and considered to be unclimbable. It is not the highest summit: the Monte Rosa, almost directly opposite, is higher by almost 170 metres. Yet the mighty rock pyramid had so far defeated all would-be conquerors. Each unsuccessful climb boosted the mountain's

aura of invincibility, so that even experienced local mountain guides often turned down generous offers from foreign expedition leaders. But the Briton did not believe in mountain demons, and his project was based on calm reflection. He had studied the books of Horace Bénédict de Saussure and come to the conclusion that the mountain could be conquered from the Swiss north-east ridge rather than the Italian south-west. It was not Breuil that would be his starting point, but Zermatt! The place where Mont Cervin was known as the Matterhorn – where Whymper had once fallen almost 60 metres.

On 14 July 1865, Whymper's 7-man team completed the first ascent of the Matterhorn. The group climbed onto the shoulder over the Hörnli ridge and, further up, in the area of today's fixed cables, diverted onto the north face. Edward Whymper was the first to reach the summit, followed by the mountain guide Michel Croz (from Chamonix), the Reverend Charles Hudson, Lord Francis Douglas, Douglas Robert Hadow (all from England) and the Zermatt mountain

guides Peter Taugwalder senior and Peter Taugwalder junior. As the climbers were descending again, and while still above the so-called “Schulter” (“Shoulder”), the four leading men in the rope group (Croz, Hadow, Hudson and Douglas) fell to their deaths on the north face. Three of the dead were recovered several days later on the Matterhorn Glacier, but the remains of Lord Francis Douglas were never found.

The Deaths Provokes the Tourist Development of Zermatt

Because of the death of Lord Francis Douglas, the then British Queen Victoria wanted to issue a ban. She said that she would never again permit English royal blood to be wasted on the Matterhorn. Her suggestion triggered curiosity and a thirst for action among British alpinists. British travellers and alpinists from then on came to Zermatt in masses to see and also climb the Matterhorn. The tourist development of Zermatt had its beginnings here. For generations, guests from the British Isles have remained faithful to Zermatt.

First Ascent of the North Face

The dreaded North Face, one of the great north face climbs in the Alps, was first climbed on July 31 and August 1, 1931 by Franz and Toni Schmid.



The first women to climb the Matterhorn

As with the first man, the ascent of the Matterhorn by the first woman was considered to be a milestone in Alpine history. At the time, the two most likely contenders were Meta Brevoort from the USA and Lucy Walker from the UK. The two women alpinists met in Zermatt in the summer of 1871, just after young Lucy had won the race to the peak.

Hörnli Ridge: Standard Climbing Route

The usual climbing route is up the Hörnli Ridge on the northeast, which is the central ridge seen from Zermatt. The route involves 1250m (4,000 feet) of climbing, mostly scrambling on rock but with some snow depending on conditions, and takes 10 hours round-trip. Some of the climbing is very exposed and climbers need to be skilled at climbing rock with crampons on their boots. The route, often guided, is difficult but not for adept alpinists. Fixed ropes are left on difficult sections. Route finding is tricky in places, especially on the lower section which is usually climbed in the dark. The descent, when most accidents occur, takes as long as the ascent. Most climbers begin their ascent by 3:30 in the morning to avoid summer thunderstorms and lightning.

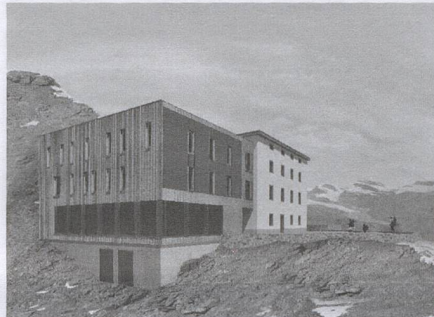
2013: Catalan Runner Sprints the Matterhorn

Kilian Jornet, a 25-year-old Catalan mountain runner and climber, set a new speed climbing record on the Matterhorn on August 21, 2013. He sprinted up and down the mountain in a mere 2 hours, 52 minutes, and 2

seconds, shaving 22 minutes off the previous round-trip speed record set by Italian Bruno Brunod in 1995. Jornet left the village church at 3 p.m. and reached the summit via the Lion Ridge (southwest ridge) in 1 hour, 56 minutes, and 15 seconds.

Death and Disaster on the Matterhorn

Over 500 people have died climbing the Matterhorn since 1865's tragic accident, many on the descent. Deaths average now about 12 annually. Deaths are due to falls, inexperience, underestimating the mountain, bad weather, and falling rocks. Many of the mountain's victims, including three from the first ascent disaster, are buried in Zermatt's downtown cemetery.



For the 150th year jubilee of the first ascent on the Matterhorn, the Hörnli hut (3,260 m) will reopen on July 14th 2015.

Gornergrat & Europe's highest hotel

With its sunny observation platform accessible all year, the Gornergrat, at an altitude of 3,089 m, has been one of Switzerland's top excursion destinations since 1898. The Gornergrat Bahn was the world's first fully electrified cog railway. Today it is a modern, eco-friendly railway, equipped with a regenerative braking system that generates electricity on the descent and so saves energy. Europe's highest open-air cog railway brings passengers direct from Zermatt station (1,620 m) to the summit of the Gornergrat, 365 days a year. The ride takes 33 minutes and requires a vertical climb of 1,469 m. The line leads over dramatic bridges, through galleries and tunnels, across forests of larch and Swiss stone pine, and past rocky ravines and mountain lakes.

At the summit station on the Gornergrat, visitors find Europe's highest-altitude hotel: the 3100 Kulmhotel Gornergrat. Facilities include a restaurant, astronomical observatory and attractive shops. Spending the night here is a wonderful experience.

<http://climbing.about.com>

Wallisertiitsch

Wallis German

Wallisertiitsch isch där Dialäkt va nu Titschschwizer im Kanton Wallis und kheerut zär heeggschtalemannischu Dialäktgruppa. 'z Wallisertiitsch hett nit numu än eyguni Grammatik, äs hett öi än eygundi Syntax und etliche eyguni Vokablä, wa vill öi üsum Italienisch 'ntleenti sind. Äs isch darum fär Schprächer üs är hochtitschu Schpraach numu schweer z'värstah.

Fränär het fascht jedes Deerfji schin eygunu Dialäkt kha, so dass mu anär Schpraach meischtuns ggmerket het, va wa där andru cho isch. Wägu där schtercheru Durchmischig sind abär Unnärschid am Verschwinnu. z'Wallisertiitsch het schich abär sit deru Ziit starch 'ntwicklut; en Walliser isch i där restlich Schwiiz aber no immer nit ganz eifach z verstah.

<http://blogs.transparent.com/german/schwyzerdeutsch-schweizerdeutsch-swiss-german/>

The Walliser Language

The Walser language (locally Wallisertiitsch), is a group of Highest Alemannic dialects spoken in Walser settlements in parts of Switzerland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Austria and in the German-speaking part of the Canton of Wallis.

The German-speaking immigration to the Wallis started in the 8th century from the canton of Bern. There were presumably two different immigration routes that led to two main groups of Walliser dialects. In the 12th or 13th century, the Walliser began to settle in other parts of the Alps. These new settlements are known as Walser migration. In many of these settlements, people still speak Walser.

The dialects are difficult to understand for other Swiss Germans (called Üsserschwyzler 'outer Swiss' by the Walliser). This is because in the isolated valleys of the high mountains, Walser German has preserved many archaisms. The dialect of the Lötschental, for instance, preserved three distinct classes of weak verbs until the beginning of the 20th century. Walser German also shows linguistic innovations, such as the plural Tannu - Tannä (fir - firs), also found in the other Highest Alemannic dialects.

The total number of speakers in all countries is reported to be 20,000 to 40,000, including 10,000 to 20,000 speakers in Switzerland, out of a population of 7.5 million, 3,400 in Italy, 1,300 in Liechtenstein and 5,000 to 10,000 in Austria.

From Wikipedia

Lower Valais patois

Essentially a spoken language, Lower Valais patois is part of the extensive family of Franco-Provençal languages. This category of dialects is limited to a specific geographical area, confined by the Oil languages (north and west), the Occitan dialects (south and southwest), German (east) and Italian (south). Traditionally, patois is spoken only in the home and in local agriculture. On occasion, the diversity of Lower Valais vernacular makes it difficult for patois speakers from different parts of the region to understand one another. Although the modernisation of the Lower Valais has hastened the decline of patois, a group of dedicated enthusiasts work tirelessly to keep it alive, compiling dictionaries, making recordings and staging plays, all in the local dialect. Like Fribourg patois and other French-language dialects spoken in Switzerland, Valais patois has survived thanks to a great many songs and stories handed down from generation to generation. There is also a growing movement of plays being performed in patois by local amateur dramatic societies.

<http://www.lebendige-traditionen.ch/>