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The Swiss Observer

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FEDERAL.

SWISS CENSUS.

The latest figures to hand show a population of 4,068,770 (1920—3,880,320), an increase of 188,450 inhabitants.

GAS MASKS FOR OUR TROOPS.

The first order for 7,000 gas masks has been placed in Switzerland. In the recent military budget voted by the two chambers, an amount of 400,000 frs. was earmarked for this purpose.

MISS SWITZERLAND.

A selection committee has been appointed which will elect on January the 17th "Miss Switzerland." The chosen one will be the official representative of Switzerland at the competition which will take place on the 5th of February at the "Opéra," in Paris, to elect a "Miss Europe," and again later in America, when "Miss Universe" will be chosen.

EUROPEAN UNION.

The Commission appointed by the League of Nations to study the question of a Federation of European States, will meet at Geneva on the 16th of this month. Federal Councillor Motta and M. Stucki, chief of the Commercial Dept., will be the Swiss delegates.

LOCAL.

LUCERNE.

The town council has voted a credit of 100,000 frs. as its share of the cost of building a railway line from Triengen to Entfelden. J.S.

BASLE.

Statistics issued by the "Aviatik" Company show that altogether 5,246 passengers passed through the aerodrome at Basle in 1930. The weight of letter mail carried amounted to 66,946 kg. and that of goods to 109,338 kg. N.Z.

* * *

Dr. F. Wieser, formerly President of the Swiss Communist party, and at present one of the editors of the *Basler Vorwärts*, has severed his connection with the Communist Party. N.Z.

FRIBOURG.

Last Saturday our contemporary *La Gruyère* at Bulle celebrated the 50th anniversary of its existence. J.S.

GENEVA.

Lieutenant-Colonel Adolph Due of Lausanne has been appointed commander of the Genevian regiment. T.G.

* * *

Burglars paid a visit to the jewellery firm of Albert Guyot, at Geneva, and decamped with over 10,000 frs. worth of goods. J.G.

VAUD.

The death is reported from Moudon of M. Edouard Payot, who was for thirty years Head-Master of the Cantonal College at Lausanne. J.S.

* * *

The State Council has elected M. F. Porchet as its President and M. J. Dufour as Vice-President for the year 1931. N.Z.Z.

NEUCHATEL.

National Councillor Henri Calame has tendered his resignation as member of the National Council, the reason given being on account of the state of his health. M. Calame has been a member of Parliament for 26 years. His successor will be M. Henri Berthoud. N.Z.Z.

ST. MORITZ.

M. J. G. Crammond made last week a new record for tobogganing on the Cresta Run. Starting from Stream Corner in practice for the scratch race, he returned a time of 29 secs. Subsequently he won the race with three courses aggregating 90 1/5 secs., an average of just over 30 secs. per course. C.E.

TICINO.

The population of the canton Ticino is returned as 161,838, as against 152,256 in 1920.

NOTES AND GLEANINGS.

By KYBURG.

A Night in an Alpine Club Hut

Chambers Journal.

One of the most fascinating branches of winter sports is, perhaps, ski-running on the glaciers and the winter-climbing of the higher peaks. The familiar delights of civilisation are exchanged for the more simple pleasures and good comradeship and adventures shared with a chosen few.

We were staying, four of us, at the chalet of a guide, far up in the Swiss Alps, as no hotels were open so high up at that time of year. Ordinary travellers do not come this way in winter; there is no railway, and all supplies have to come up on a mule's back. All around us were lofty ice peaks, hanging glaciers, and sparse, silent fir-trees. The peasants still wear the national costume and spin yarn at a spinning wheel. If you are favoured, you will be treated as an old friend and introduced to all the families in the village.

We arranged to be called at six o'clock next morning, and having struggled into skiing kit, and four pairs of goat's-hair socks and heavy boots, we crept downstairs, stiff with cold, to eat our breakfast. Hot coffee and fresh baked bread—the last we were to taste for some time—made us feel less comatose and more able to cope with the start; so, shouldering our rucksacks, which had been carefully packed with provisions the night before, we set off in single file towards the mountain.

The cold air off the glacier, as yet untouched by the sun, froze in our lungs, and, as usual, we were a very silent and 'sticky' party until we got into the rhythm of the pace set by the leading guide.

Presently we warmed up, and the steep slopes of frozen snow claimed our attention as we 'kick-turned' on our skis at the end of each zigzag. The view became more entrancing every moment; little pink clouds hovered over the snow-clad peaks, but soon the crystals sparkling in the sun forced us to put on our dark glasses, which would rather have spoilt our contemplation of the scenery, had we had time to look at it. We had not. In fact, a surprisingly large portion of the day, when climbing, is spent in looking at one's own or someone else's boots.

Just as we felt we could climb no longer without a stop, the guide called a halt, and we took off our heavy rucksacks with glad thoughts of lunch. The snow here was soft enough to allow us to sink in to our knees when we took off our skis, so we stamped it down with our feet sufficiently to make a firm platform on which we could sit on our rucksacks in comfort.

Bread, sausages, apples, and raisins were produced for our meal; but, in spite of our thirst from climbing in the dry air, we knew there would be nothing to drink but a thimbleful of tea out of a flask until we arrived at the hut that evening.

Now that we had leisure to examine them, our surroundings proved awe-inspiring and magnificent. On one side of us, grotesque seracs stood balanced on the brim of the ice-fall, while the green walls of the crevasses slipped away into the intricate mazes of tumbled ice. Very far below, minute black spots, which were people, could be seen moving about the distant village. But it was soon time to be on the move again.

Our route appeared to get steeper and steeper, nor was the snow very good. Some of us preferred to take off our skis and fix climbing-irons, a species of iron-pronged sandal, on to our boots, and to climb on foot up the rocky fin of the moraine; others were faithful to their skis, and trusted to the sealskins tied underneath to hold them on the frozen slopes. Either way was hard work, and it was a relief to get out of the narrow valley on to

the comparatively gentle terraces of the upper glacier.

The sun had disappeared and a flurry of bitter wind and snow stung our faces as we reached the exposed pass. The man in front, although only a few yards away, was barely visible, and the points of sharp, splintery snow cut our faces and temporarily blinded us. With fumbling fingers we drew our woollen helmets over our faces, and bent into the blizzard.

There was a wild exhilaration in defeating the elements and in struggling to keep the regulation place, like ships at sea, behind the person in front.

While the burst of storm was at its height we reached a particularly exposed portion of the route; before us was the steep slope of detestably hard snow, and below it a grey, swirling mist, veiling, as we knew, the jagged teeth of the broken ice-fall. One of the party in front slipped, and for one tense moment the others braced themselves in their stances to take the shock of the falling weight. Luckily our friend landed on a narrow ledge; a pull on the rope and a few moments for recovery, and we started off again.

The last half-hour had told on us all; grasping our ski-sticks on a long, right-handed traverse had made our hands feel suspiciously numb; agonising pains in partially frozen toes told of returning circulation; our lips were black and blistered, and our cheeks burnt on the side of the prevailing wind. How we longed to see the hut, but always there seemed one rise more before the top could be reached.

Presently the last slope was crossed, the last buttress turned. Before us stood a stout little wooden cabin, fair and square in the centre of a field of ice, with double doors and wooden shutters, proof against any blizzard, its iron chimney-pot promising the warmth and food which were to come.

Presently we crowded in, brushing the snow from our shoulders and piling up our skis in the corridor. One fetched in snow to melt for the pot; another lighted the stove with carefully preserved wood, brought up for the purpose in summer. Others unpacked the rucksacks and placed the provisions in baskets slung from the ceiling.

What we needed was *tea*; but some time must elapse before the pot could boil, so we turned our attention to our feet. Gratefully we dragged off our frozen boots, and exchanged them for dry socks and the loose, felt-lined clogs provided by the Swiss Alpine Club for those using the huts.

The temperature in the room was still nineteen degrees Fahrenheit below freezing, so we sat huddled round the stove, our shoulders draped in blankets, until the long-hoped-for drink should be forthcoming.

Soon gallons of hot tea were ready, drunk from aluminium mugs, which were even hotter. Every now and then someone would get up to replenish the 'kettle' with a ladle or two of fresh snow from the pail, and a savoury smell of macaroni cheese and good thick soup, prepared by the guides, made a satisfying supper. Each of us added luxuries from his rucksack, *pâté de foie gras*, jam, and raisins being very popular.

Now that the stove was burning and the big hanging-lamp was lit the hut was pleasantly warm. Cigarettes and pipes were lighted, maps brought out, and plans for the following day discussed.

The guides produced cards, or sat down to yarn with us, until, at 8 p.m., we struggled out to take a last look at the weather. The wind was still roaring round the hut, but a few stars were visible. We longed to stop and gaze at the wild beauty of the masses of gleaming ice and ebony rock, but the bitter temperature drove us hurriedly in again.

'Bed-time' comes early in the High Alps, for fuel must not be wasted, and an early start next morning was necessary. We kicked off our boots, put on extra woollen jerseys, gloves, and even fur helmets, and rolling ourselves each in his own blanket, with several more on top, settled down to get what sleep we could on the straw mattresses of the wooden bunks above.

At first it seemed impossible to hope for any rest. Snores from the older hands resounded on all sides; the hut moaned and rocked in the wind; and the icy cold discovered a weak spot

CITY SWISS CLUB.

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