

Zeitschrift:	The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK
Herausgeber:	Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom
Band:	- (1935)
Heft:	705
Artikel:	Flights from arctic to equator
Autor:	Mittelholzer, Walter
DOI:	https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-690089

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: 17.01.2026

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

The Swiss Observer

FOUNDED BY MR. P. F. BOEHRINGER.

The Official Organ of the Swiss Colony in Great Britain.

EDITED WITH THE CO-OPERATION OF MEMBERS OF THE LONDON COLONY.

Telephone: CLERKENWELL 9595.

Published every Friday at 23, LEONARD STREET, LONDON, E.C.2.

Telegrams: FREPRINCO, LONDON.

VOL. 14—No. 705

LONDON, APRIL 27, 1935.

PRICE 3d.

FLIGHTS FROM ARCTIC TO EQUATOR

Lecture by Walter Mittelholzer on April 15th,
at King George's Hall, Tottenham Court Road, W.

The City Swiss Club, Swiss Mercantile Society, and the Nouvelle Société Hélyétique are to be heartily congratulated, on having given Switzerland's foremost airman, an opportunity to address his countrymen about his various flights in distant lands.

Not a seat was vacant, when the Swiss Minister introduced Mr. Walter Mittelholzer to the audience in the following words:

I have the privilege to-night to welcome our famous countryman, M. Walter Mittelholzer, and I need not say how highly I appreciate that privilege, for it has for a long time been my personal wish and that of all of you to give an official token of our admiration to the man whose name is so widely known, not only to the air-minded sections of countries far and near, but also to all who follow the progress of the most modern means of locomotion, that to which M. Mittelholzer so successfully devotes his courage and his energies.

His readiness to meet us in this Hall and to give us a first-hand idea of what can be achieved by a man like himself, with the elevating assistance of an aeroplane, is a source of pleasure for which I would like to express my gratitude.

But although we are all eagerly looking forward to his lecture and impatient to hear him speak himself, I am afraid I must detain you for a few moments in order to give you a short synopsis of the work of the man who has come to talk to you here in the centre of London and who, not longer ago than yesterday, was skiing in a snow-storm on the Säntis in Switzerland, at a height of 7,000 ft. and after a climb of six hours.

Like all celebrities who have done really great things, M. Mittelholzer is of a modest disposition and were I not to emphasize his merits beforehand, you would probably gain a very inadequate impression from him of the tremendous difficulty and superior quality of his achievements.

These achievements are on such a vast scale that it is not an easy thing for me to give you any proper idea of them. Also they are so many-sided that I must here have recourse to my notes, to make sure that I am giving you a more or less accurate summary of them. In spite of all that our friend has done he is still a young man, having passed his fortieth year at the beginning of this month, on the 2nd, to be exact. At the age of 21 he was flying an aeroplane of the Swiss Army, and for the last nineteen years he has passed the best part of his time in the air. He is obviously a man who holds that the future of the world is in the air, and in taking this view he is to a great extent in agreement with the politicians and diplomats, though the latter naturally use the expression in rather a different sense than he does.

What I am telling you here will really only be an enumeration of his principal flights, those which long ago gained him his reputation as one of the international pioneers of flying. I will say nothing about his merits in connection with the establishment and progress of our Swiss aviation, I think I can take it for granted that you know all about that.

Since 1923 practically each year sees one of his great flights, which have been carried out consecutively over the greater part of the old world, in Junker machines, Fokker machines and Douglas machines, and so forth.

In 1920 he takes part in the rescue flight for Amundsen in the arctic regions; in 1924 and 1925 he flies to Persia; in 1926 and 1927 he explores the Central African regions during his flight from Zurich to Capetown, in a

Dornier Hydroplane; in 1929 and 1930 he takes a Fokker over the Kilimandjaro and Mount Kenya and the same year, 1930 and 1931 he explores the flying routes of Western Africa, the Atlas mountains, the Niger, the Lake of Chad, and Senegal, the Sahara and Morocco; in May 1933 he flies in one day from Zurich to Tunis, Rome and back to Dübendorf, 2,600 Km., which distance he covered in 8½ flying hours, in a Lockheed aeroplane belonging to the "Swissair," this being the world record flight for that distance and time. In 1934 he flies from Zurich over the Balkans to Egypt and approaches Abyssinia for the first time in flying history from the Sudan, over the difficult Ethiopian mountains, direct to Addis Ababa. In the summer of the same year he flies from Zurich to Naples, Athens, Istanbul, Belgrade, and back to Zurich, a total distance of 4,500 Km., in fifteen hours, that is to say, at about 300 Km., per hour, average speed.

These are only a few of the principal flights, for you must keep in mind the fact that in all M. Mittelholzer has flown over 500,000 Km., up to the end of last year, in over 8,000 flights.

And if you think that our friend is only just an aviator, great as he may be in that capacity, you only take into account a part of his accomplishments. He is, at the same time, an artist and a writer of books. He is also to some extent a scientist, as the results of his explorations have contributed to the knowledge of geology, geography and ethnology in a measure which is very highly acknowledged.

You will presently have an opportunity to convince yourselves of M. Mittelholzer's remarkable talent as a photographer, and as regards his literary activities, I can only instance that he has published no less than half a score of books in as many years, not to mention his contributions to geographical and flying magazines.

Moreover, he holds the Gold Medal of the Swiss Aero Club, and those of several foreign institutions, such as the French and the Austrian ones, as well as that of the International League of Aviators.

That is a rough sketch of what our friend, who will presently address you, has achieved so far, and I think that he will have to work very hard if he wishes to break his own record and surpass these successes in the future.

But, of course, we can expect anything from men like him!

However this may be, what he has to tell us to-night will, for the present at least, give us all enough to think about.

Mr. Mittelholzer seemed to be embarrassed with this laudatory introduction, but when he started his lecture he received a vociferous reception, he said:

"During my 20 years of flying I have crossed the Alps a hundred times in all varieties of weather and under all conditions. I have been privileged to show thousands of passengers the magnificence of our snow-capped mountains, each flight having an entirely different aspect. On clear, calm days one can fly quite close to the mountains, forests and peaks without experiencing the slightest shock; but when the south wind rages over the Alps and roars through the valleys, one may be sucked down at any moment. On these occasions the flyer loses his "foothold," as it were. His blood quickens in his veins; he sits in his rocking plane, beset with a thousand risks, as he attempts to traverse the tempestuous aerial ocean above the mountains.

Up to now, "flyer's luck" has favoured me. [Ed.'s note: But once he looked Death in the eyes and felt his cold hand. He was commissioned

to take an Italian machine from an aerodrome near Milan, over the mountains to Zurich. The sky was clear, he swung himself up to height of 16,000 feet and hoped to land in the aerodrome at Dübendorf in an hour. Then the peaks of the Swiss mountains unexpectedly disappeared in fog, and he found it impossible to take bearings above the deceptive fluctuations of the clouds. Turn back? No! In about half an hour he should have been above the Lake of Zurich; so he pushed on through the fog to seek his destination.

If only there had been no deceitful counterwind, his calculations were not correct. A snow-storm set in and soon destroyed all visibility. After gliding for a minute the feeling of equilibrium left him and he felt himself being tossed about in the unknown. Then, suddenly, a dark mass rose before him and as suddenly disappeared. A black rock wall, as if charmed out of the greyness by a ghostly hand, flitted past him.

The often-proved experience that in such moments of real danger one's whole life passes through the mind in fractions of seconds was his experience then. The faces of his dearest friends and closest associates flashed before his eyes.

Suddenly a brilliant, glittering white mass shot up before him out of the grey fog. Instinctively he pulled on the rudder. Then crash! The machine had struck violently against something. Then the stillness of death. How long he lay there unconscious he did not know. He had struck upon a steep snow slope. The machine lay 300 feet above him. Then came a terrible evening, a ghastly night in a desolate hut, and then the painful way down into the valley. Frozen fingers, smarting wounds, hunger and exhaustion! Weeks — no, months — were needed before the wounded knee-joint and the broken thigh bones were again in active service].

"In order to be prepared for all unexpected adventures and the tricks of the wind at high altitudes, I went in for acrobatic flying and practised all the 'stunts,' such as looping, inverted flights, wing-overs, and tail spins. — But that was all long ago.

Whereas my first flights over the Alps were carried out in small single-engined planes, we now use the most up-to-date and most reliable material in the world.

Here you see a three engined Fokker with three British Armstrong engines of 300 horse power each. This machine can attain 16,000 feet with a load of ten passengers with the greatest of ease.

Still more up-to-date, and above all faster, is the new Douglas Air-Liner with its twin 700 horse power engines. It can fly with only one engine without losing altitude, which completely eliminates all risks of a forced landing — no simple matter at any time in the Alps.

The Swissair has four Douglas planes, one of which flies since April 1st on the new Express line Zürich-London. — This distance of 430 miles takes just three hours flying time, which means flying at an average speed of 150 miles an hour.

These planes are as comfortable as a Pullman car, and there is so little noise from the engines that conversation is as simple as on a train. The plane is equipped with wireless and radio-bearing station as well as with the new automatic pilot. In fact if you will permit me to use a phrase to sum up the planes accomplishments in a word, it can truly be said that "it flies through the air with the greatest of ease....."

Nearly two-thirds of Switzerland consists of mountains the peaks of which exceed 15,000 feet. Seen from the air, the panoramas are superb. Sufficiently extensive landing places are everywhere at hand in the low-lying valleys which nestle between the mountain ranges, and which

have been constructed of late years by the military and civil authorities.

From the three large international aerodromes of Zürich-Basel, and Geneva, the high mountain region can be reached in a half-hour flight. In an hour we have already flown over the chains of the Urner- and Berner Alps and are above the Matterhorn and Mont Blanc.

The Alpine chain, which, with an average of 65 miles in breadth, separates German-speaking northern Switzerland from the southern Italian-speaking part, is at the same time the sharp, climatic boundary between the raw, foggy region of the north of Europe and the milder, more sunny zone of the Mediterranean countries.

I have always enjoyed letting my thoughts wander beyond the limited confines of my own country, out into the vastness of the world. It was, therefore, merely a matter of waiting for a favourable opportunity to fulfil my dreams. During a short stay in Berlin in 1923 I was asked by the Junkers Works, if I would take part in the Junkers Spitzbergen Expedition, which was to be an auxiliary expedition to the first intended Polar flight of Ronald Amundsen.

At the time Captain Amundsen was attempting to fly from Alaska to Spitzbergen over the North Pole, but because of the limited radius of action of his machine there were doubts as to the successful execution of this bold plan.

I accepted the proposition with enthusiasm. The next day I started in my plane from Hamburg via Denmark and Norway, and at Bergen joined the Expedition party, which had already arrived by steamer. A Dutch coaling vessel took four days and nights to carry us, in sunshine and rain and all kinds of weather, along the magnificent fjord coast, to the north. When we had passed the Arctic Circle a radio message reached us from Alaska, stating that Amundsen had given up his projected Polar flight on account of damage to his Junkers machine.

This message put an end to our proposed plans. It was very disappointing for us to turn back after having so nearly reached our desired goal.

After a hurried conference, we decided to continue our journey to Spitzbergen in order to study there, in a few flights, Arctic conditions and to take photographs of this little-known part of the world. And so a new situation was created and new problems arose which I liked far better than the idea of a rescue expedition.

Our new task was the detailed exploration of Spitzbergen, and we were able to return home with limited, but profitable, results.

At the time, I made the following entry in my diary — "The aeroplane serves as a means of exploration of unknown land difficult of access; therefore an era of profitable exploration has been opened up. The aeroplane will play a very important, if not a decisive part in future Arctic and Antarctic exploration."

All my prophecies have been fulfilled. Three years later Byrd in an aeroplane and Amundsen, Ellsworth, and Nobile in a dirigible flew from Spitzbergen over the North Pole, and in the spring of 1928 Wilkins succeeded in traversing the Arctic region in an uninterrupted flight from Alaska to Spitzbergen.

Pilot Neumann and I traversed a considerable stretch of the Arctic regions. After a few reconnoitering flights, we started with our Junkers hydroplane, Type F 13, and flew, in 6 hours 40 minutes, over the highest peaks of Spitzbergen, as far as the Hinlopen Strait and the North East Land. From there we returned along the magnificent fjords of the west coast to our starting point, the whale-fishing station of Green Harbour.

This was the end of the Spitzbergen Expedition.

I returned home with valuable experience. Often, during my flights over the mountains of the "Land of the Midnight Sun," which reminded me very much of the Alps at home, I fancied myself over the highest peaks of the Bernese Oberland.

After this first and wonderfully successful journey in the Far North, I often travelled in thought into foreign countries. In the winter of 1924/25 I began a distant air excursion. I started from the Lake of Zürich and flew via Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Iraq to Teheran. The Junkers Works and the Persian Government engaged me for the flight, and especially the energetic Persian Ruler, Reza Khan Pahlevi, wished me to demonstrate the great value of air traffic to his country.

Under the protection of Reza Shah, I made various flights in Persia during a two months sojourn. My mission was to chart the most suitable air lines in that country. Once I traversed the high passes of the Elbruz Mountains to the Caspian Sea; at another time I flew over the mysterious places of Isfahan and Shiraz as far as the Persian Gulf.

The culminating achievement of my Persian flights was to cross the premier mountain in Persia, the ice-crowned Demavend, which towers

to a height of 18,600 feet. That flight is indelibly impressed on my memory, as I was the first to fly over it.

Two years later, in the winter of 1926/27, I flew over Africa from north to south with three companions. We were the first to fly over this part of the world in a hydroplane. No engine trouble occurred during the flight.

Eight months were spent in preparation for the trip. The distribution of about 4,200 gallons of gasoline among four European and 20 African stations alone required four months. My German Dornier hydroplane, with a 12-cylinder BMW motor, with which I won twelve world records on the 24th and 29th of July in Zürich, worked excellently during the African trip.

From Switzerland, via Italy, Greece, and the Mediterranean, I reached Cairo in 21 flying hours. From there I followed the long course of the Nile to Lake Victoria in order to arrive on the east coast of Africa near Beira, by the way of Lake Tanganyika and Lake Nyasa. From there, in four stages, I reached Capetown via Durban and East London.

Between the Zambezi and Beira I experienced one of my most difficult situations. We flew 6,500 feet above Nyasaland, one of the well populated districts of Africa. The sun set at 6:35, while we still flew onward to the southwest, above dense virgin forest without a river valley. Anyone who knows how quickly darkness in the Tropics sets in after sunset will understand my serious thoughts.

At last we were over the Pungwee which, however, at this point did not look at all tempting for a landing. In a deep ravine, with steep sides and fringed with steeple-high virgin forest, it flowed toward the south in great bends. So, further on we must fly, in spite of the rapidly enveloping darkness! —

Continuation and finish in next number.

DIE AUSLANDSCHWEIZER IN GEFAHR. Ihre Probleme — unsere Aufgaben.

Von Gerhart Schürch.
(“Bund” 3. Febr. 1935).

Fortsetzung.

Es besteht heute für uns aber noch ein anderer Grund, in unserem eigenen Interesse mehr für die Erhaltung des Auslandschweizertums zu tun, als bisher: Die Sorge um den inländischen Arbeitsmarkt. In den Jahren 1926-30 sind jährlich im Durchschnitt 8300 militärfähig, also zum grössten Teil berufstätige, jedenfalls arbeitsfähige Schweizer ausgewandert. 1933 betrug diese Auswanderung nur noch 4300. Zugleich aber ist die Rückwanderung im Verhältnis zur Auswanderung stets gestiegen (einzig das Jahr 1933 verzeichnet eine Abnahme der Rückwanderung). Seit 1931 haben wir einen jährlichen Rückwanderungsüberschuss von durchschnittlich etwa 2000 militärfähigem Schweizerbürgern zu verzeichnen. Wenn man weiß, wie viele Arbeitslose sich unter diesen Rückwanderern befinden, so wird man einsehen, wie wichtig es ist, die Positionen der Auslandschweizer soweit als möglich zu halten.

Und dann wollen wir — wenn man sie schon in Zahlen messen kann — die Bedeutung des Auslandschweizertums für die kulturelle, für die künstlerische, wissenschaftliche und politische Rolle unseres Landes in der Welt nicht vergessen. Wir können es uns nicht leisten, auf den Ruhm zu verzichten, den Gelehrte, Staatsmänner, Künstler, Ingenieure, und Arbeiter im Ausland dem Schweizernamen erwerben. Die Werbekraft des tüchtigen Auslandschweizers — und er ist tüchtig, in 99 von 100 Fällen — diese Werbekraft für schweizerisches Produkt jeder Art ist unserer wirtschaftlichen wie geistigen Selbstbehauptung in der Welt unerlässlich.

Gehen wir in kurzem Rundgang hinaus zu unseren Landsleuten in der Ferne, und sehen wir zu.

wo sie stecken, was sie treiben, welches ihre Probleme sind:

Die grösste Zahl befindet sich in den europäischen Ländern, nämlich insgesamt 240,000, gegen 77,000 in Amerika, 8000 in Afrika, 2500 in Asien und 1600 in Australien (die Zahlen sind vom Jahre 1932).

Unter den europäischen Ländern steht an der Spitze Frankreich mit 132,000 Auslandschweizern. Davon sollen sich in Paris allein etwa 40,000 befinden, also mehr als im ganzen Kanton Zug oder als in der Stadt Biel. Im übrigen verteilen sich die Schweizer in Frankreich hauptsächlich auf den Südwesten, wo sie in der Landwirtschaft, und auf den Norden, wo sie in der Industrie tätig sind.

An zweiter Stelle folgt mit 51,000 Deutschland, wo der Schweizer als Präzisionsarbeiter in der Maschinen- und Uhrenindustrie, als Unternehmer und Arbeiter vor allem in der süddeutschen Textil- und Nahrungsmittelproduktion und als Bauer auch in Ostpreussen angesiedelt ist. Italien zählt heute noch 17,400 Schweizer, die

zum grossen Teil als Bank- und Kaufleute, häufig in leitenden Stellungen tätig sind, zum Teil auch in der Marmor- und Strohindustrie, und vor allem in der norditalienischen Industrie, bei deren Aufbau insbesondere in der Textilbranche sie wie in Süddeutschland einen ganz wesentlichen Anteil gehabt haben.

In England wohnen noch 14,500 Landsleute. Die bedeutendste Kolonie ist London, wo eine grosse Zahl schweizerischer Kaufleute und Finanzmänner tätig ist.

In deutlichem Abstand folgen dann mit unter 5,000 Auslandschweizern Belgien, Spanien, Rumänien, Holland, Russland; mit unter 1,000 die osteuropäischen Länder und mit ganz kleinen Kontingenten die baltischen und skandinavischen Staaten.

Von den 77,000 Schweizerbürgern Amerikas befinden sich 46,000 in den Vereinigten Staaten, zum grössten Teil als Farmer; an der Westküste vor allem Auswanderer aus dem Tessin.

Ebenfalls zur Mehrzahl in der Urprungsland befinden sich die 15,000 Argentinisch-schweizer tätig, sowie die 7,500 Kanada-, die 4,300 Brasilien-, die 1,600 Chileschweizer.

Bedeutende Schweizerkolonien befinden sich noch in Mexiko, Paraguay, Uruguay, Venezuela, Guatamala und Kolumbien.

Mit wenigen Ausnahmen sind die Zahlen der in den amerikanischen Staaten wohnenden Schweizer ziemlich stark zurückgegangen. Im Jahre 1928 befanden sich noch 83,000 Schweizer in Amerika, 1932 wie gesagt noch 77,000; an diesem Rückgang von 6,000 sind die U.S.A. allein mit 3,000 beteiligt.

Im Vergleich zu diesen Ziffern sind die andern Kontinente ziemlich unbedeutend. Immerhin zählt Afrika gegen 8,000 Auslandschweizer, wovon 3,500 in Algerien, 1,800 in Französisch-Marokko, je 600 in Ägypten und Britisch-Südwestafrika. Seit 1928 sind die Zahlen der Schweizer in Afrika gestiegen; der Zufluss kam hauptsächlich Algerien und den übrigen französischen Besitzungen, sowie Britisch-Ostafrika und Belgisch-Kongo zugute.

Aus Asien ist eine starke Rückwanderung zu verzeichnen von Niederländisch Indien, dafür eine Zunahme der Kolonien in Britisch-Indien, China, auf den Philippinen und in Palästina. Die geringe Gesamtzahl der Asienschweizer (2,400), sowie auch die der Australienschweizer (1,600) darf uns nicht dazu führen, diese Kolonien zu vernachlässigen; denn gerade in einzelnen von ihnen liegen liegen heute noch Zukunftsaussichten für die Auswanderung und für den Export. Bei der Betrachtung der heute dringendsten Probleme aber müssen wir uns auf die wichtigsten und auch am schwersten betroffenen Kolonien beschränken. Das sind heute: Frankreich, Deutschland, Italien und Österreich. In nächster Nähe unseres Interesses stehen aber auch die übrigen europäischen Staaten, der nahe Orient und Nordafrika, sowie Nord- und Süd Amerika.

Fortsetzung folgt.



The AIR EXPRESS to SWITZERLAND

Quickest and shortest through service

London - Basle . . . 3 hours flight
London - Zurich . . . 3½ hours flight

Operated with comfortable
Douglas 14-seater Planes by

SWISSAIR
Swiss Air Traffic Co. Ltd.

For detailed information and bookings apply to
IMPERIAL AIRWAYS, London, Telephone Victoria
2211 (day and night), Telegrams IMPAIRLIM, London,
or any authorized TRAVEL AGENT.

MAGGI'S PRODUCTS OF WORLD-WIDE FAME.

Maggi's Soups: delicious and wholesome—14 Varieties
to choose from.

Maggi's Seasoning: unique for improving Soups, Gravies,
Stews and Sauces.

Maggi's Consommé and Bouillon Cubes: for the
immediate preparation of an exquisite broth.

On sale at all good grocery stores. If not stocked yet by
your regular grocer, apply to MARBER & CO., 1 Stanhope Street,
London, N.W.1.