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SWISS POSTMAN'S VISIT TO BRITAIN

By DEREK MEAKIN



Franz Hug at work in Lucerne, starting on his round and (centre) passing the time of day with a happy housewife. But conditions are not always so easy for the postman. The one on the right has to use skis to deliver mail to an isolated mountain hamlet.

Meet Franz Hug, Switzerland's postman extraordinary. He is in Britain this month for a unique occasion — a letter-round that he will remember for the rest of his life.

It all started on 4th January when postman Hug arrived in London with his mailbag slung over his shoulder. Then he began his round, which embraces most of Britain's major towns and cities, and is taking him 20 days to complete.

He has been in mayors' parlours, handing over messages of friendship from the chief citizens of Berne and his home town of Lucerne.

When Britain's Postmaster-General, Mr. Ernest Marples, heard of the visit he asked if he, too, could meet the Swiss postman.

For Franz Hug this is indeed a VIP visit — with all the trimmings. But how did it all begin?

For that we have to go back to early 1957 and a visit to Switzerland of film producer Cyril Jenkins. This was a working holiday, the aim of which was to find an unusual story-line for the second of a series of travel films his company was producing.

Like most Britons visiting Switzerland, Jenkins ended up in Lucerne. He saw the usual sights — the bustling shopping streets, the old buildings, the Lion monument; and he particularly enjoyed the evening he called to see a show of folk songs and dances given by a group going by the gay title of "Merry Swiss Yodellers".

Next morning he had quite a surprise when, outside his hotel, he spotted the leader of the yodellers, wearing postman's uniform and delivering parcels.

It was Franz Hug, and he told Jenkins of the double life he was leading — as a postman by day and a showman at night.

That meeting gave the film producer the germ of an idea which was to turn into a remarkable picture called "Postman's Holiday", with Franz Hug as its star.

Jenkins made it his business to learn more about the work of Swiss postmen.

He visited the postal museum in Berne, where he learned of the fascinating history of the service. He saw mail being delivered to little villages along the main alpine highways by the big yellow luxury post-buses.

He was also told about some of the unique ways in which Swiss postmen have to carry out their everyday activities — making use of every possible means of transport from the very latest ultra-light vans to rowing-boats, sledges and even skis.

Jenkins returned to London to make his preparations, and a few months later, when the Alpine flowers were at their loveliest and the 1957 tourist invasion of Switzerland was beginning to get under way, he was back with his film unit.

The completed picture, which had its premiere at the West End's biggest cinema, is now being taken on what is literally a Cook's tour of Britain — for Cook's travel agency is sponsoring its screening at free film shows which it is arranging in the principal towns.

This is where Franz Hug comes in again. He is bringing his "Merry Swiss Yodellers" with him and, in addition to carrying out his official postman's duties on behalf of the Swiss postal administration, is making personal appearances at the shows.

By the middle of January performances had been held at Leicester, Nottingham, Cambridge, Manchester, York, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Brighton.

The rest of the tour is: Coston Hall, Bristol (16th January), The Pavilion, Bath (19th), York House, Twickenham (20th), Seymour Hall, in London's West End, and the Town Hall, Wandsworth (both 21st January), Kursaal Ballroom, Southend (22nd), and Town Hall, Torquay (23rd).

Tickets for any of these performances can be obtained from the local offices of Thomas Cook and Son.