

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: - (1963)

Heft: 1426

Artikel: The weather in Switzerland

Autor: [s.n.]

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688594>

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: 15.01.2026

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

Mais revenons, pour terminer, au fond du problème : celui d'un peuple que doit convaincre sa jeunesse de sa condamnation à la supériorité. Et cela dès l'école primaire. L'école, entre autres devoirs fondamentaux, doit se faire l'écho de cet impératif. Il s'agit donc aussi, pour l'industriel, de reconnaître toute l'importance de l'instituteur et de trouver avec lui de nouvelles méthodes de dialogue permanent et systématique. Cette coopération permettra la révision de certains moyens d'enseignement afin que nous sortions de nos écoles non seulement des bibliothèques, mais des têtes, des hommes qui puissent s'imposer plus tard dans notre empire, à l'étranger.

Le maintien d'un climat général de recherche et de perfection implique la nécessité de tout mettre en œuvre

pour garder intactes les forces créatrices de notre jeunesse, éviter leur gaspillage. D'où l'importance aussi des loisirs. Que de brevets déposés, que de titres scolaires et professionnels conquis à la faveur des heures de liberté ! Aussi ne saurons-nous trop insister auprès du patronat pour qu'il fasse figurer dans son cahier des charges la question des loisirs. Cette conquête sociale peut devenir notre chance ou notre perte. Le problème qui se pose à la Suisse, quelles que soient nos opinions politiques, est celui de notre force de renouvellement, de notre vitalité. Les jeunes Suisses en ont encore à revendre. A nous de la canaliser convenablement. Alors la relève sera assurée.

(Tiré de la " Revue économique franco-suisse ".)

THE WEATHER IN SWITZERLAND

All last summer and autumn the weather god had strange moods, and the unusual drought still made itself felt severely in many parts when an early winter set in. Many places were short of water, villages in the Jura, but also towns, and for instance in Lucerne full baths and the washing of cars were prohibited. By 13th December, sixteen passes were already closed because of early snowfall in the mountains.

In Mid-December severe storms ravaged the country. One of the badly hit parts was La Gruyère, where the roof of a factory was carried away. In the Cantons of Vaud and Valais, too, there was considerable storm damage. In Basle, Berne and Zurich winds of almost hurricane force swept the towns, caused widespread damage and held up rail traffic. A precious stained-glass window in the cupola of the Swiss Houses of Parliament was badly damaged.

Before Christmas already much snow had fallen in high altitudes, and avalanches came down, cutting off villages like Muerren and Zermatt. Food had to be taken to the village of Guttannen by helicopter. One of the avalanches blocked the Gotthard main line, hitting a goods train and blocking the track for several days. Two thousand cars formed a solid traffic block as far north as Brunnen on the Lake of Lucerne. The Simplon line was working to utmost capacity, and the Ticino could only be reached via the Centovalli.

The Christmas rail traffic was slowed down by the extreme weather, and the main line stations of the large towns had to cope with huge additional numbers of Italian workers returning to Italy for Christmas. Literally hundreds of special trains were put on (Basle alone had 81), and it was due to excellent organisation that the delays could be cut from two hours to one hour and less already on the second day.

Christmas was one of the coldest on record, even in the Valais and the Ticino where the thermometer sank as low as -17°C . In Basle it was the coldest Boxing Day for 186 years. At the end of the month, December could be called the coldest for 58 years. But worse was to come. Snow fell not only in the mountains but also in towns whose immediate vicinities were turned into ski-ing resorts. In the Cantons of Neuchâtel and Vaud enormous snow drifts blocked roads, cut off villages and dislocated traffic. Swiss newspapers carried pictures which could have been taken in the arctic. As the cold grew the danger of avalanches decreased, though there were several fatal accidents. The cold became really arctic by the middle of the month. On 15th January, "The Times" reported :

"The temperature fell to a record -37°C (-34°F or 66° of frost) today at La Brevine in Neuchâtel canton. For the first time since 1956 the lakes of Baldegg and Waeggital are completely frozen."

La Brevine was called "Swiss Siberia", where the lowest temperature reached -39°C . In Geneva it was the coldest January for 44 years; in Basle 13th January was the coldest since 1755 — -19°C . Not only in the Grisons but also in other parts of the country, lower than -30°C was quite common. January was as cold as is usual in Helsinki! Sunshine, especially in the mountains, was registered in much the normal quantity.

By the end of January, most of the smaller lakes were frozen, some having as thick a cover as 40 cm. (e.g. Lac Noir). On 19th January, two wine-growing farmers walked across the Lake of Biel to the Isle of St. Peter, where they received the traditional reward of a bag of walnuts. Fifteen thousand skaters enjoyed themselves in the Bay of Biel on the first Sunday in February.

On most frozen lakes it was expressly forbidden to drive a car, but a motorist tried his luck on the Lake of Morat. He succeeded, unlike a driver on the Greifensee who sank with his companions. Two fellows, both young fathers, drove a lorry on to the Hallwilersee and lost their lives when the ice broke under the weight. Frogmen could only find the bodies.

Remarkable was the freezing of fast-flowing rivers like the Doubs, which provides a magnificent skating-rink several miles long. Even the Aare at Solothurn, Olten and other places is covered with ice, an event which has not happened for as long as one can remember. But even the Rhine is frozen up at Basle harbour. That has, of course, serious consequences. Already in the autumn, low water hampered river traffic. There was some improvement in the water level in the middle of December, but owing to the cold floating ice had formed and navigation had to be stopped. For the first time in 34 years, the river was frozen to its full width at the "Three Countries Corner". The salvage boat of the Basle Fire Brigade was used as an ice-breaker, partly to prevent damage to the anchored boats, but also to prevent the many visitors to the frozen harbour basins from walking on to the ice in the open river, which is too thin to be safe.

Perhaps the most sensational event is the freezing up of the whole Lake of Zurich. Even "The Times" showed pictures on 5th February. By 21st January, there was so much ice that navigation was restricted and soon had to be stopped. By the end of the month, the whole lake was covered with a sheet of ice varying from 10 to 13 cm. and

growing every day. With typical Swiss thoroughness special regulations were put into force. Not only is the ice tested constantly by scientists, but also floodlit and checked at night when it is prohibited to go on the lake. Special police forces have been manned, provided with life-saving equipment and five motor sleighs with lifeboat trailers. A signalling device is in operation from shore to shore, policemen on skates have "walkie-talkies". Five first-aid stations and an extensive loudspeaker system have been installed. There is a warning system of sirens in case of "Foehn" wind or storm approaching. Not more than 25 people may conglomerate. Large yellow posters along the shore give instructions. Over a hundred stalls for the sale of hot sausages, chestnuts and drinks have been erected. Thousands of skaters and walkers, some pushing perambulators, some propelling themselves with sticks and having wooden boards attached to their shoes, revel on the ice. Not only has practically every visitor brought a camera, but professional photographers accompanied by "ice-bears" take unusual photos.

On the first Sunday there was a real ice festival and on Monday afternoon the schoolchildren were given a holiday. In the "Schweizerisches Kaufmaennisches Zentralblatt" there was a report of a Zurich engineering firm whose management invited the whole staff to a party on the lake on the afternoon of 1st February to celebrate the event. Hot punch, sausages and rolls were transported on two sledges. Police permission had to be obtained, and the staff had to be spread out over a fairly large area. But the success of the party was assured.

It is estimated that 200,000 visitors were on the lake at the first week-end. Exact figures will be available later when detailed photographs from the air have been examined. Since 1600 the Lake of Zurich has frozen up twenty times, the last occasion being in 1929. At the time this report was compiled, the ice was still getting thicker and had reached a depth of 26 cm. No motor traffic was allowed up to then, and no bicycles. Ice sailing was prohibited on the Zurich Bay.

The Lake of Constance, too, has been freezing up except for a stretch between Romanshorn and Friedrichshafen. Although it has not officially been opened to pedestrians, groups of Germans crossed the lake into Switzerland equipped with ladders, ropes and dinghies.

The winter weather has not only brought pleasure, but also hardship and damage. A slight thaw around 6th February brought flooding in parts. The "Basler Nachrichten" brought a picture of the "Schuetzenmatt-park" which was positively Venetian. On the other hand, the drought, especially in the Jura and the Grisons, caused much hardship. Stringent rationing had to be introduced and a heavy "water tax" in some places. The lower Limmat Valley suffers from lack of water, too, and the state of the hydro-electric power supply is giving anxiety. During the night 16th/17th January supplies failed and more energy had to be imported. Many parts of Switzerland were without electricity and all emergency generators were in use for hospitals, telephone exchanges and public services. The population was asked to be careful not to use any electric stoves where any other kinds of heating were available. The federal administration has drastically reduced its consumption, all lighting has been cut to a minimum, and electric stoves are only permitted with a medical certificate. The Federal Railways have dropped trains and reduced heating. Saving has become essential as France and Germany are no longer able to export current, and all demands have to be met from within Switzerland.

But not only Switzerland's "White Coal" production has suffered; oil fuel stocks have been seriously reduced. On 24th January, "The Times" published the following report:

"Swiss stocks of fuel, particularly oil, are running low because of the disruption of rail, road and river traffic by the cold. Navigation has stopped on the Rhine and the port of Basle is completely frozen up for the first time in 34 years. To ease the situation, which is getting worse every day, the Federal Government today decided to release up to 10 per cent of the war reserves of fuel for sale to the public. Hospitals are to have priority."

Swiss houses are well protected against arctic winters and the scare of burst pipes does not exist to anything like the same degree as in this country. Nevertheless, accidents have happened and the fire brigades have had to be called out. In Bulle 600 litres of water a minute emptied on to the main road until the town's reservoir was emptied — due to a burst caused by frost. Lausanne was without gas owing to frost damage to the large storage tank at the gas-works. At the military barracks of Moudon sixteen N.C.O.s and other soldiers suffered from poisoning due to a defect in the shower bath installation. Ice had formed in the chimney which prevented the carbon dioxide from escaping. Due to the frost, rails sank and considerable reduction of speed had to be effected by trains; some fifty stretches were affected, mainly in western Switzerland. A number of derailments occurred, fortunately none of them serious. Snow weighed down electric and telephone cables. The roof of a workshop at Einsiedeln caved in under the weight of the snow, causing damage of at least Fr.200,000.—. Huge icicles falling from roof-tops became a danger to passing pedestrians in Geneva, where a number of accidents were reported, also caused through icy roads. Special precautions for road users were issued by the Swiss Office for the Prevention of Accidents. Needless to say, there were also accidents on the frozen lakes and rivers, mainly fractures and head injuries.

Three people, two men and a woman, have been reported frozen to death, from Biel, Meiringen and Alaneu in the Grisons. All three are presumed to have rested or fallen and then slowly suffered death from freezing.

"Cold spell takes heavy toll of wild life" was the heading of a report from "The Times" on 26th January. It said:

"The protracted cold spell is causing many casualties among wild life in the mountains. Chamois, driven down from the heights by hunger and thirst, are victims not only of poachers but also of foxes and sometimes even of farm dogs. Helicopters are now dropping bundles of fodder in the areas where these graceful creatures normally live, in the hope of checking their fatal migration.

"Roe deer are faring no better and even the more robust red deer are being compelled to approach farms and mountain hamlets — they are being helped in some districts by their traditional foes, the hunters, who are putting out fodder, bread, and other food.

"Outlying farms are being besieged by jackdaws. After putting the smaller birds to flight they perch on windowsills and roofs waiting for housewives to throw out kitchen waste. There are reports, too, of buzzards — among the bolder birds in any season — being seen in the outskirts of Geneva preying on mice or chickens.

"Lake Geneva, which has a covering of ice only in the shallows near the banks, has now a greatly increased temporary population of wild duck, grebes, and seagulls,

as well as its resident ducks and swans — the latter in the privileged position of enjoying municipal support and protection from the towns around the lake.

"In Geneva they have their full-time guardian who prepares meals twice a day for them on Rousseau's Island. Through the newspapers and radio he has appealed to the public — so far without complete success unfortunately — not to feed the birds themselves but to deposit their gifts, usually dry bread or buns, in the bins outside his hut. Scores of birds trying to reach titbits thrown from the promenade have been frozen into the ice. Those whose plight is observed in time are rescued by the river police, who respond to calls even in the bitter cold of night. At Rolle, along the lake, amateur frogmen are performing similar missions of mercy."

On the Rhine below Schaffhausen huge accumulations of birds were observed and special bread collections at the local bakeries were made to feed them. But not only wild animals suffered; in the Val-de-Ruz (Neuchâtel) cattle had to be slaughtered as the farmers were no longer able to feed them.

The hard winter has brought bad sales to the markets in towns. Basle, whose market outside the Townhall is usually a lively and colourful scene in the morning, was practically deserted and car parking was already allowed before lunch. Vegetable production declined, but there were plenty of dried vegetables available, and apples, too, came into their own. Milk production in eastern parts of Switzerland showed even an increase and made good the losses in the French-speaking part of the country.

The clearing of ice and snow has brought much extra work and many headaches to local authorities. The municipal budget of the town of Zurich usually allows half a million francs for that item. The first three weeks of January had already used up that amount, not to mention the Fr.315,000 which the clearance had cost in November and December. But it must be said that the work was tackled most efficiently, helped by modern equipment.

Two new methods of defrosting have been reported. At Fleurier the snow from the roads was put into the Buttes stream, where huge masses of frozen snow soon had to be cleared. A trench was hacked in the ice and filled with old petrol-soaked tyres. These were then lit and the snow masses melted away quickly.

The other much more important method was reported by the BBC, and "The Times" gave the following description on 11th January:

"ANTI-FREEZE" KEPT AIRPORT OPEN

"Chance brought about an invention which may revolutionize air navigation by increasing winter air traffic.

"Last year an employee at the Zurich-Kloten airport discovered a mixture containing alcohol which enabled the local runways to be used during the intense cold just before Christmas. For many days, owing to glazed ice, no aircraft could land at Geneva airport, or in France or western Germany.

"The mixture concerned — the secret formula has not yet been divulged — was found by mere chance by a member of the airport staff. He had made with alcohol a liquid for preventing his car from freezing and he was surprised to see that some drops which fell on the glazed ice dissolved it rapidly.

"Experiments were made by, among others, the federal laboratory for the testing of materials, which made it clear that the liquid did not attack concrete, steel and rubber.

"All the trials having been successful the Zurich airport authorities had a motor tank constructed containing about 1,350 gallons with 24ft. hoses on each side for spraying the runways. It takes from 35 to 40 minutes to spray the main landing runway, which is 4,050 yards long and 30 yards wide. The glazed ice melts within five to 15 minutes according to its thickness.

"One spraying costs nearly £100, but Zurich airport found the process profitable as 70 aircraft landed and paid £1,600 of airport duties."

Finally and paradoxically, the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade reported "Ice in a few minutes". A new ice-making machine has been invented, details of which can be found under business news later in this issue. It will, no doubt, come in handy when we are suffering from sweltering heat and yearning for the cold!

RECENT DEATHS IN SWITZERLAND

Reading through the sheets reporting recent deaths in Switzerland, I was struck by how many had occurred amongst prominent members of the press. The editors of several local papers died, amongst them Adolf Schwab of the "Berner Tagblatt"; and former editors like Achille Gruber of the "Schweizerische Depeschenagentur"; Fritz Egli of the "Limmattaler Tagblatt"; Dr. Joseph Keel of the "Rheintalische Volkszeitung"; Editor-in-Chief of "Neue Zuercher Nachrichten" and "Die Woche im Bild"; Gustave Neuhaus of "La Suisse Libérale" and Louis Loze of "La Suisse Horlogère" and "Revue Internationale de l'Horlogerie". Marius Berthet, known as "Ruy Blag", died in Geneva, and the well-known journalist Emil-Friedrich Rimensberger, who was the first *Attaché Social* at the Swiss Embassy in Washington, at Cornaux sur Chamby. The oldest publisher of the Jura, Ernest Grossniklaus, died at St. Imier at the age of 90, and the well-known publisher, Max Rascher, in Zurich at the age of 80; he specialised in beautiful issues of Swiss writers like Conrad Ferdinand Meyer and was the first to publish reproductions of Ferdinand Hodler's works.

A number of well-known scientists also have left this world: the economist, Professor A. Amann in Berne; Professor Dr. Ernst Gaugler, expert on the New Testament at the University of Berne; Professor Charles Gonet, reader in Forestry at the Federal University of Technology in Zurich from 1941 to 1957; the astronomist, Professor Edmond Guyot from Neuchâtel; the Schaffhausen geologist, Jakob Huebscher; the well-known surgeon from Geneva, Professor Dr. Charles Juillard; Dr. h.c. Johann Friedrich Schmid, the discoverer of the zodiacal light, farmer at Oberhelfenschwil, St. Gall; Professor H. Sturm-Specht, well-known shorthand expert from Zurich; Professor René Vernioy, reader in Palaeontology at the University of Geneva; and finally the social economist, Professor Dr. O. Widmer, from St. Gall.

The world of art has also lost some prominent members: the dialect writer, Karl Grunder, from Berne; the writer, Dr. Carl Ritter, famous for his Joseph Schmidt biography, "Ein Lied geht um die Welt"; the novelist, Edwin Arnet, who wrote the pageant play "Das Eidge-nössische Wettspiel", for the Swiss National Exhibition in Zurich in 1939; Georges Hoffmann from Geneva, who specialised in criminal and psychological sketches for the radio; and the well-known Vaudois René Morax who wrote novels, poetry and plays and the text of "Le Roi