

One hundred years of Swiss Alpine Club

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ONE HUNDRED YEARS OF SWISS ALPINE CLUB

A hundred years ago, on 19th April 1863, the Swiss Alpine Club was formed by thirty-five men assembled in a room in the Buffet de la Gare at Olten. To-day the Club counts over 43,000 members, of whom upwards of 700 belong to the Association of British members. They are thus a tiny section of a great organisation, but linked to it by ties, historical, sentimental, and practical, that epitomize the rather curious relationship between British mountaineering and Switzerland.

The closeness of this relationship has given rise to one striking and perhaps even still prevalent misconception — that Switzerland was “discovered” by the English. In fact, it was not until after 1850 that British climbers began to make much impression on the Alps. Before then, a long line of Swiss *savants* had explored and mapped the mountains, studied their flora, geology, and glaciology, had painted them and written about them, and to those ends had climbed for the first time to many of their summits. But their aims were preponderantly scientific; and it was indeed the English who established mountaineering as a sport. Since early climbers did still feel the need to clothe their personal adventures with a show of scientific purpose; but not for long; and by the time Whymper climbed the Matterhorn in 1865, mountaineering could be regarded less as an incident in the pursuit of knowledge than as something worth doing for its own sake.

The next fifty years saw the growth of the *Corps des Guides*, the building of huts, and the opening up of the mountains to tourists. It was as a mark of recognition of all that the Swiss had done in furthering the development of the new sport that the British Association was formed in 1909. The initiative came from a group of British members of the S.A.C. and Professor Roget of the Geneva Section, who met at a dinner on the 23rd June 1909, and subsequently wrote to Colonel Répond, President of the S.A.C., proposing the formation of a section in London.

Colonel Répond was immediately sympathetic, and although there were difficulties later, the Association eventually took almost exactly the form suggested by him in his reply to the original letter. The inaugural dinner was held on 8th December 1909, and the Britannia Hut was opened on 12th August 1912.

This, then, is the background to the Exhibition held at the Alpine Club Gallery, 74 South Audley Street, London. Apart from the history of the S.A.C. and the British Association, the organisers tried to illustrate, even though fragmentarily, the growth of mountaineering from the exploratory climbing of the pioneers to the highly technical sport of the present day, and to suggest the complementary roles played by Swiss guides and their English clients in the golden age.

In the section on early mountaineering, prints and photographs, many of them unique, showed climbers from de Saussure to the pioneers of the classic routes, the guides who led them, and the primitive structures which in those days served them as huts. In the modern section a series of photographs of the chief climbing areas in Switzerland gave some idea of the range of present-day climbing — from the North Face of the Eiger to ordinary climbs for average climbers.

The Exhibition was opened by the Swiss Ambassador, accompanied by Madame Daeniker, on Monday, 25th November. The President of the Association of British Members of the Swiss Alpine Club, Dr. A. W. Barton,

the Central President of the Swiss Alpine Club, Dr. Wyss-Dunant (leader of the Swiss Everest Expedition) and Sir John Hunt, who, incidentally had been made an Honorary Member of the S.A.C. at the Centenary Celebrations at Interlaken at the end of September, were present, as well as several members of the Swiss Embassy.

In Switzerland, the Centenary was celebrated in Basle and Berne, where individual groups had reached this venerable age. Near Kandersteg a jubilee camp for some three hundred youngsters was held. The main celebrations took place at Interlaken, where Federal Councillor Spuehler, the President of the Confederation last year, delivered the main speech. There was also a trip on the Lake of Thun and a religious service at the Schlosspark of Oberhofen.

At the moment, the Swiss Alpine Club have financial worries regarding their mountain huts. There are 151 huts in the Alps, forty of which in the Valais and the Vaudois Alps, thirty-three in the Bernese Alps and eighteen in Central Switzerland. Fourteen are in Glarus and St. Gall, thirty-five in the Grisons and eleven in the Ticino. The six largest huts have accommodation for between one hundred and one hundred and fifteen mountaineers, and eighteen huts have telephone connections.

ERNEST ANSERMET IN LONDON

On 11th November last the famous Conductor Ernest Ansermet celebrated his eightieth birthday. He was born in Vevey and studied at the University of Lausanne and later at the Sorbonne; his musical training, too, he had in Switzerland and in Paris. He was a teacher of mathematics in Lausanne, but in 1910 he began his musical career at Montreux. From 1915 to 1923 he was with Diaghilev's Russian Ballets. Then he conducted the “Association Symphonique” of Lausanne and later the “Orchestre de la Suisse Romande”. Many have been his tours abroad, and he enjoys fame in many countries.

On the occasion of his eightieth birthday, he was made an Honorary Citizen of the town of Lausanne, and the President of the Confederation sent him a congratulatory telegram.

Ernest Ansermet was in London early in December, when he gave two talks at the Royal Institute of Great Britain, organised by the British Institute of Recorded Sound. One was on “Problems of Music” and the other on “The Stravinsky Case”. After the lectures “The Times” devoted considerable space to reviews.

In “Monsieur Ansermet Renews a Controversy” they said:

“It is tempting to turn an unresponsive shoulder to M. Ansermet's frank polemics, but there are two reasons for not doing so. One is his eminence. This is no provincial choirmaster pontificating from the organ-loft, but a man who has been in touch with new music all his long life, who worked with the Diaghilev Company in its greatest days, who gave the first performances of many Stravinsky works in the period between the wars. If now he has things to tell us about Stravinsky's music that those of us who love them would rather not hear, there is at least no one with a better right to do so.

“The other reason why we should listen to him is that there is always the possibility he may be right when he claims that young composers are in danger of being misled by a heresy propagated with all the fervour of political or religious ideology and all the financial resources of big business.”