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SWISS-BRITISH CENTRE, DÜRRENAESCH

British Women on Swiss Holiday Study Tours

Some 700 British women who believe that travel should be study, as well as pleasure, are coming to Switzerland in groups of thirty to forty-five to learn about the country as more than a land of Alps, watches, cheese and chocolate.

Their tours have been arranged through the Swiss National Tourist Office in London and Zurich, with the pilot help of the "Pro Helvetia" foundation, and a wide variety of co-operative organisations. The first groups arrived in April; the final ones this year are scheduled to come in October.

The women are all members of Townswomen's Guilds in England. These local guilds represent part of a national network with general cultural and educational aims; organisation membership, of about 211,000, includes a cross-section of all women in the country.

The visitors come to a "home" in Switzerland — the Swiss-British Centre at Dürrenäsch housed in facilities established in 1956 for a more general purpose of accommodating Swiss living abroad and returning for holidays. The facilities now have a dual mission.

Dürrenäsch is a quiet, agricultural community of some 1,000 inhabitants set 565 metres above sea level among gently sloping hills in the Canton of Aargau. From this central location, Zurich, Basle, Berne and Lucerne are easily accessible. The community dramatically came into the news in September 1963, when a Swissair plane crashed near it. A striking stone monument to the Swiss who died aboard — forty-three farm people from the village of Humlikon — stands just at the entrance to Dürrenäsch.

Fairly typical of the British groups now making the village their temporary home was a recent unit of visitors from the Central London Federation of Townswomen's Guilds. Retired teachers, professional workers, and mothers were included in their ranks.

Mrs. Douglas McConachy, the tour organiser, explained how the guild organisation encouraged enlargement of individual interests through special sections like arts and crafts, social studies, drama, music. "We're more than just social, you know", she declared.

The visitors embarked on a whirlwind schedule to prove just this point that began with a lecture on Swiss history and government. The English guests, always lively and inquisitive, particularly peppered a Zurich lecturer on the Swiss educational system with very specific queries. They wanted to know about facilities for adult education,

about accommodations for the mentally or physically-handicapped child, about whether parent-teacher associations existed and about general problems of discipline in Swiss classrooms. In a discussion of national traditions and customs, the visitors were anxious to know what were the rights of women, by law and custom.

During a week's stay, the group visited a dairy farm, saw the *Bundeshaus* in Berne, toured the Migros headquarters in Zurich and dined, individually, with Swiss families. Sightseeing in the mountains was more than simply gaping at the Alps; one member of the group was an expert on mountain flowers and discoursed on all varieties encountered.

In all, exactly seventeen groups will come to Switzerland under the holiday-study programme in 1966 and, already, twenty groups have enrolled for similar tours next year.

Laura Pilarski.

* * *

Laura Pilarski, born in Niagara Falls, N.Y., of Polish descent. Came to Europe 1960; wrote and travelled on the Continent, eventually specialising on Eastern Europe; living in Warsaw, Poland, for two years, in Switzerland since late 1963, writing about Switzerland for McGraw-Hill Magazines, New York and for North American Newspaper Alliance, New York (Feature stories). Contributed to a businessman's guide book to Europe, wrote several articles for "Weltwoche".

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