

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: - (1973)

Heft: 1674

Artikel: Young Swiss from abroad in the Ticino

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-691748>

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YOUNG SWISS FROM ABROAD IN THE TICINO

The Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad organised a hiking camp in the Canton of Ticino from 23rd July to 11th August. One hundred participants from 23 countries, including young people from Japan, USA, Paraguay and Senegal, met at Giubiasco, where they had their base-camp. They made the necessary preparations and got a first impression of the land and people and to make their first contacts with the other participants and the leaders. Many a youngster may have felt somewhat lost with his little suitcase in the huge "Mercato Cooperativo" of the Giubiasco Commune. But there was neither enough time nor the right atmosphere to feel homesick or even desolate.

On the second day, those taking part went to a small hill to get used to what the following days would bring and to examine closely feet and shoes. Those who were not quite happy with their footwear or had imagined roaming around the Ticino hills and mountains in plimsolls, were issued with suitable hiking shoes by the organisers.

On the third day, the individual groups of eight to eleven members, started on the big hike. Under experienced leaders, the journey covered the upper part of the Ticino (Sopra Ceneri), and the groups put a total of some 200 actual walking kilometres behind them. For the ten groups there was special accommodation in various parts of the Canton, and these were visited in turn. As the aim was to get to know the country and its people, as well as to foster international comradeship, the hiking plan was fixed in such a way as to enable two groups to meet in the same place. Whether these quarters were situated in the romantic Verzasca Valley or on the shores of the beautiful though very polluted Lake Maggiore, or on the historic Gotthard route, the young people always had a marvellous time, regardless of whether the lodgings resembled comfortable hotels (as at Bodio) or military camps.

Two marching days were always followed by a rest day which groups spent partaking in games and sport, sight-seeing or simply lounging about. The latter was very popular, for occasionally one did feel the need of resting the fatigued limbs. It was the feet which gave much trouble to the chief leader (the Youth Service head of the Secretariat), for anyone with grave blisters had to be transported to base-camp for a day or two, until things were normal again.

The order of the day was largely set by group members themselves. It went without saying that participants had an important word to say in the matter of plans for the following day, which trips one was going to undertake by rail, postal coach, boat or on foot, of menus – fairly often – or when problems cropped up.

The small team at the base-camp at

Giubiasco was responsible for the well-being of the groups and the smooth running of the daily routine. It was in charge of the camp leader Franz Schmid. Every morning, the reports and plans for the day were received from the group leaders. Then some short visits were made to individual groups. Some needed provisions, somewhere else a "patient" with bad blisters had to be transported to base-camp. In one place where tempers had run high in an argument, they had to be soothed. In another, high spirits had to be calmed. After visiting the groups – usually one only returned by evening – the reports from the group leaders had to be awaited. These were instructed to get in touch with base-camp every evening between six and eight and to report on the day's happenings. If no special incidents had to be examined, the team at base-camp, too, could enjoy a little relaxation. If . . .

One evening, the four members of the team were sitting in their office at Giubiasco, waiting for the last report and looking forward to a good Swiss game of Jass and a drop of the best. Shortly after 7 p.m. nine reports had come in, and all seemed to be well. Then it was 7.30, and still the last group had not reported. A quarter to eight, and the four began to

get indignant. If only Hans would ring soon! Eight o'clock struck, and still the blessed 'phone would not ring. Unfortunately, the group whose report was still outstanding was at the "Campo sportivo" where the supervising team was barely tolerated and where relations with the group leader were rather tense. They had been told that if the slightest irregularity should happen, they would have to go home. In the meantime, it had got to 8.30 and there was only one possibility: the camp leader got into his jeep, not exactly with enthusiasm and shot off – Jass and wine would have to wait till the following day! The case was solved in an hour and a half. Hans, the group leader, was terribly embarrassed and apologetic – he had simply forgotten to make his report! The whole group had safely arrived at the "Campo sportivo" long ago and started to organise a party.

On Thursday, 9th August, all the groups returned to Giubiasco. A whole day was spent on getting people and material into such conditions that they could safely face civilisation again. On Friday, a farewell party was arranged, and at sunrise the next day, the young compatriots left for all parts of the globe. Au revoir in Switzerland!

Rural
Ticino
Scene

