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SNOW OFFERS SURPRISING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

For those who want a cheap bed near the snow field

Caravaning in the snow is gaining in popularity. Winter sports enthusiasts possessing a caravan sooner or later decide to take their mobile homes with them on their winter excursions. Despite this refreshing contact with nature, they do not want to do without the convenience of a well equipped caravaning site incorporating sanitary installations, a wash-house and a drying-room. The *Touring Club Suisse*, rue Pierre Fation 9, 1211 Geneva, maintains 13 well equipped camping sites. Nearly all of them are close to well-known resorts: Berne, Lauterbrunnen, Lenzerbeide, Leysin, Morgins, Diemtingen, Ricken, Saanen, Sembracher, Tenego Miralago, Tschier, Vaduz and Weissenburg. The caravan site of Grusch in lower Prattigau is being inaugurated for this winter. It is ideally situated 600 feet away from the lower terminal of the Danusa chairlift which takes skiers up to a magnificent and little known skiing region lying at over 5,400 feet. There is also a skating rink quite nearby. However it is advisable to a reserve a caravan-space in time. There is also a new caravan site one mile away from the lower terminal of the aerial cableway of the Hoch Ybrig region. The site is supplied with electric power from its own transformer house. Caravan owners can obtain useful tips and information from the *Touring Club Suisse Camping and Caravaning Guide* costing one franc.

For those who want to try Bobsleigh ...

Many winter-sports resorts in Switzerland possess tobogganing runs but very few have specially prepared sledding tracks. One of them is at Preda, near Bergun, on the Samedan-Thusis road. The natural three-mile long tobogganing run at this resort is open daily (in favourable snow conditions) and can be used during evenings by sledding fans. The track is illuminated.

Tobogganing runs also exist at Davos, Engelberg, St. Moritz, Murren, Wengen and, as of recent date, at Saas Fee. Toboggan races for guests organised by the resorts are a big attraction (e.g. Murren and Preda on 17th February). But tobogganing is of course not only a holiday relaxation, it is an important competitive sport with Davos as its centre. Classes for budding tobogganists are held at Preda during Christmas and New Year. Swiss championships take place in the first week of February. This year, they saw for the first time a special event for juniors.

... or Ski-bob

Although the principle of ski-bobbing was discovered in the 1920s by an Austrian who developed an apparatus known as a "Veloski" (ski bicycle), the current trend into this comparatively new sport began in 1965. As it is far easier to master than skiing, it is a growing attraction to those who are discouraged by the difficulty and cost of skiing. The problem of hauling a ski-bobber up a slope has been solved in several resorts by adapting ski-lifts. Ski-bobbers also enjoy special runs in most places. This is particularly true of Crans-Montana, the Swiss Mecca for ski-bobbing and the village where the sport was first revived. Other winter resorts with separate ski-bob descents are: Adelboden, Amden, Anzere, Appenzellerland, Arosa, Bergun, Chateau d'Oex, Flims, Gryon, Gstaad, Haute-Nendaz, Kiental, Kleine, Scheidegg, Lenk, Lenzerbeide, Leysin, Moleson-Village, Ovornaz, Pontresina, Rigi, Saas-Fee, St. Moritz, Savogni, Silvaplana, Tbyon, Tschierschen, Unteriberg, Verbier and Villars.

There are ski-bob schools at Arosa, Chateau d'Oex, Crans, Fiesch, Grimentz, Grindewald, Saas-Fee and Tschierschen. The Montana-Crans "Grand Prix" (3rd-4th March) and the 6th International Ski-bob Championships at Arosa (11th March) are the ski-bobbing highlights of the season.

... Or Cross-Country Skiing

Spring skiing in the uplands or higher altitudes is an unforgettable experience. Spring is a time of the year when one can have the Alps to oneself. Participants to cross-country skiing tours should be good skiers and in good physical shape. They should naturally set out with a guide who knows the area and its weather conditions. Four mountaineering schools organise three types of cross-country skiing tours every year. The schools of Pontresina, Grindewald, Fiesch and La Fouly organise tours lasting for about a week qualified as "easy, average and advanced". Thus the mountaineering school of Fiesch organise the three tours from 29th April to 5th May. One tour, of a fairly advanced level, costs 420 francs. This includes board and lodging and a guide. A slightly less ambitious tour for average skiers starting at Fiesch and reaching the Lotschenlucke via the Konkordia Hut, the Finsteraarhorn and the Jungfrauoch costs 390 francs. An easy ski tour lasting one week is also being arranged in the Grindewald area.

Basle—Wealthy but not without Problems

Although Basle is Switzerland's wealthiest city with a per capita income of about 15,000 francs, its authorities have the greatest difficulty in balancing their budget. After having cut nearly a hundred million francs from the draft 1973 budget, the expenditure for the current year will top a billion francs and show a deficit of 138 million francs. Nevertheless, the losses for 1973 will be smaller than those of 1972 (185 million) and 1971 (161 million). With considerable federal prodding, the municipal authorities of Basle have done their best to keep their expenditure down to acceptable proportions and thus help to fight inflation.

The main reason (besides increased costs) for the budgetary situation is that Basle-Town, which forms a so-called Half-Canton, pays for much of the services enjoyed by the Basle-Country, its sister half-canton. Thus Basle spends 20 million francs a year maintaining a theatre of a very high standard for which Basle-Country only makes a symbolic contribution. 60 million francs are spent on the University, which caters for a wide outlying area. This is also true of the city's hospitals. Basle has recently opened

a new biological research centre costing 50 million francs, and will soon inaugurate a new theatre. Moreover, many of the people who spend the daytime in the city of Basle are commuters living in Basle-Country, Aarau and neighbouring French and German cities, in particular Mulhouse.

Attempts at obtaining some sort of compensation from neighbouring authorities have so far failed. The people of Basle recently accepted in a cantonal vote to increase local taxes. This provided about 50 million francs extra cash. But with soaring commitments and rising costs, the need for new revenue has prompted two left-wing political parties into demanding more taxation on the rich. They want a 50 per cent increase of Fortune Tax for estates of between 250,000 and 500,000 francs and a 100 per cent increase on estates of over 500,000 francs. They are also calling for a rise of cantonal income tax on high salaries (the maximum of 22 per cent on 115,000 franc salaries should be increased to a maximum of 33 per cent for earnings of 250,000 francs and over). On the other hand, they want to abolish income tax on low wages and allow married women to earn an income

of up to 6,000 francs tax-free. The two parties finally want to raise an extra 20 million francs from corporation tax.

With the Zurich-Winterthur area, Basle is Switzerland's most important industrial conurbation and attracts thousands of workers from Alsace and Bad-Wurtemberg. In fact, Basle is the economic hub of a wide area embracing its Swiss hinterland, Alsace, Franche Comte and Bad-Wurtemberg. This area is known as the *Regio Basiliensis*. The fact

that three countries are involved in its future has resulted in the opening of high-level talks in Paris on certain problems shared by all the parties concerned. Foremost among these problems are the development of the international airport of Basle-Mulhouse, and navigation of the Rhine.

The Rhine has played games to Swiss fluvial navigation last year. The Port of Basle registered a 3.4 per cent decline in its traffic in 1972 because of its

abnormally low water levels interrupted traffic. Tonnage registered both ways totalled just under eight million tons. Basle would like to see the Rhine dredged between Strasbourg and Saint Goar, and is willing to contribute to the operation. The Rhine's growing pollution is also a problem which the three countries will have to tackle together, and to which more tri-partite talks shall be devoted.



SWISS ABBEYS

We continue our series on Swiss abbeys and convents begun in our last issue with a description, this time of the Mariastein Monastery.

The village and monastery of Mariastein are built high above a cliff overlooking a deep gorge along which runs the winding road from Metzerland to Flub, in the Jura mountains of Solothurn.

The celebrated pilgrimage of Mariastein ends at a church perched high on the edges of abrupt rocks. It has been magnificently restored. From one of the side altars, a flight of steps takes you to passages hewn into the rock and leading to several chapels. The walls and altars are adorned with innumerable ex-votos.

The monastery of Mariastein was founded on 9th October 1645, by Fintan, Priest of the Benedictine Abbey of Beinwil, also in Canton, Solothurn. This community had been founded under the patronage of the counts of Thierstein in 1085. Later, the abbey fell under the patronage of the State of Solothurn, which in 1645 authorised Father Fintan to transfer his community to the isolated reaches of Mariastein.

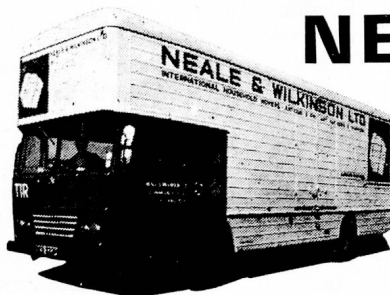
The abbatial church there was consecrated on 31st October 166 in honour of Saint-Vincent. The splendid high altar is a gift from Louis XIV, the French monarch.

This monastery was closed down by the French armies which invaded Switzer-

land in 1792. The State of Solothurn obtained its establishment in 1804 and was secularised in 1874. The greater part of its monks then went to Delle, and later to Durenberg in Austria. A few remained at Mariastein to officiate for the pilgrims which still visit the monastery every year. Thirteen abbots, mitred and crosiered, have since managed the monastery.

For centuries people have venerated a celebrated Statue of the Virgin in the underground church. Mariastein is considered as one of the greatest pilgrimage of Central Europe. More than 60,000 pilgrims visit the sanctuary every year. Princes, prelates and many celebrities are among them. Hotels have been erected in the vicinity to accommodate this flood of pilgrims.

Before its secularisation, Mariastein was a high centre of learning. Its renowned college has since been replaced by a secondary school.



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