

**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:** - (1974)  
**Heft:** 1694

**Artikel:** Climbing the Matterhorn at 71 (part 2)  
**Autor:** Stettbacher, Werner  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688627>

### **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:** 13.09.2025

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

expenditure on this advertising brings in some business to them and let's face it they bear the brunt of the increased costs, particularly over the past two years.

However, the main thing is the paper keeps going and we all hope that it brings interest to our Readers and will continue to be so for many years to come.  
H.J.T.

## Climbing the Matterhorn at 71 by Werner Stettbacher (Part 2)

*We continue here the account begun in our last issue sent to us by a reader from Glasgow, Mr. Werner Stettbacher, on his fourth ascent of the Matterhorn. It is a vivid proof that it is possible, with the right attitude, to be as fit at the age of seventy-one as at the age of thirty!*

Italy being at present in the midst of an economic crisis, with inefficiency and corruption in higher places, postal services in a state of chaos, the crime rate soaring and the railways and buses being affected by continuous strikes, a number of friends in Zurich advised me not to go to Italy. But in Macugnaga I found everything normal; a first-class hotel where we were all members of a big family, very good food and everything at half the price I would have had to pay in Switzerland!

On Saturday, July 27th, a perfect

day, I called on the local office of guides. The man in charge is a grandson of the famous guide, Imseng, who settled down here in his later years. He recommended his son, a prominent local guide, chief of the Mountain Rescue Organisation, and also custodian of the Marinelli Hut. He not only speaks perfect Schwyzerdeutsch, but life seems to have no problems for him. Almost every other word deals with "problems". Asked what the fee for a Matterhorn climb would be, he replied: "No problem, if you have no money you pay nothing, if you have some, pay a little, etc." His whole life seems to centre around problems that do not exist. I found him a delightful companion.

He suggested that we should leave for Zermatt immediately.

I thought it wise to telephone first to Geneva airport, and an official there assured me that the weather would be good for certain till the following

Monday, and probably till Tuesday, and that I should therefore go ahead.

We left Macugnaga for Domodossola very early on Sunday, July 28th, but as the bus we had in mind is only run on weekdays we had to take a taxi, and the numerous bends taken at speed made me "sea-sick", not exactly a good start for a Matterhorn climb.

We reached the base from which the climb starts at about 5.30 p.m. There, at a height of about 3,300 metres, at the foot of the Matterhorn proper, you can either pass the night at the Refuge "Hoernli" of the Swiss Alpine Club or in the rather larger "Belvedere" owned by the Commune of Zermatt. We chose the latter, although it is a little more expensive, but the food is very good generally. Formerly the "Belvedere" was a small hotel, with individual beds; but with the growing number of climbers, it had to be re-built and enlarged.

On the eve of our climb, the weather was well nigh perfect; my sole concern was how I would fare the next day. It is true that, through constant training up to 3,000 metres, I can still manage a pretty good pace on good paths but, after all, at 71, a Matterhorn climb is not exactly a joke, especially in the difficult conditions prevailing on July 29th, with a lot of snow lying about. Had I not already had difficulty in reaching the summit in 1929, when I suffered the mortification of being overtaken by an American family of four consisting of father, mother, son and daughter! As against this, 1946 seemed child's play,

## When you lunch out, lunch inn



Our beautiful Four Seasons Restaurant offers superb food, impeccable service and a relaxing view over the Park; which, like our Menu, reflects the changing attractions of each season.

On the other hand, if you prefer to lunch in a more traditional and intimate atmosphere – try the popular Vintage Room. It serves a full International menu, but is especially proud of its fine Scotch steaks and ribs of beef.

(After dark, our Vintage Room takes on a night-club atmosphere where you can dine from 8.30pm and dance from 9pm until 2am.)

### *Inn on the Park*

Hamilton Place, Park Lane, London, W.1. Tel. 01-499 0888

but then conditions were just perfect. Or, in 1959, when I made the still formidable crossing down to Breuil, Italy.

We left the "Belvedere" the following morning, at 3.20, after a fairly good breakfast, including Nescafé and condensed milk. It was rather dark, but with the help of my guide's pocket lamp we made steady progress. About a dozen parties of two or three climbers, some with guides and some without, started at about the same time. The usual race began; it is strange how the young and inexperienced climbers are always in a hurry right from the start, take a delight in passing others, only to falter later on and often have to give up altogether. I intended to reserve my strength for the later and more difficult phases of the climb. Nevertheless, we made steady progress, through chimneys, smooth rocks and other obstacles, without seeing much for the first one-and-a-half hours or so. This was just as well, for during our descent some of the obstacles and especially precipices, looked quite frightening. After about three hours and having negotiated the famous (or rather infamous) Moseley Platte, we reached a small platform, on which the Solvay Hut stands. There is room here for eight to 10 climbers, but it is forbidden to use it except in an emergency, such as being caught in a storm, or being too late to descend to the "Belvedere". This hut had just been re-equipped the day before through the use of helicopters.

The two parties that had overtaken us earlier on were here already in

difficulty, and as we never saw them again we assumed that they had to abandon the climb.

Here we took some refreshments and photographs for the real task now began. You now start climbing over what is called the Shoulder (Schulter) until you reach the Roof (Dach) leading to the Swiss summit. Immediately after the Solvay Hut, there is a bad bit, some tricky passages follow, and a slope at an angle of 45 degrees covered with snow and, at times, ice. Several steel rings have been driven into the rocks, to enable climbers to take all the necessary precautions particularly during the descent. We were now approaching the "piece de resistance" of the whole climb, where you have to do some good rock climbing directly over the ridge with the assistance of eight to 10 fixed ropes. Below the first fixed rope there were three young climbers who had just decided that they had had enough. One of them, quite cheerful despite the setback, offered me some Coca-Cola. I have heard a good many detrimental things about this drink, I was myself prejudiced up till then, but I must say that I enjoyed the drink and that it fortified me for the final assault. The fixed ropes were particularly helpful on two overhangs. I cannot say these passages were exactly easy, but according to my guide, I mastered them well and elegantly. With these obstacles overcome it still took us half-an-hour to reach the summit. Normally, the "Dach" is mostly bare rock, and there is quite a path

plainly visible; this time nothing but snow or even ice.

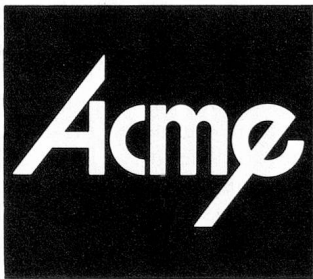
At about 8.45 I was at last standing on the Swiss summit! What a sense of elation! At 71 I was standing for the fourth time on the Matterhorn without feeling tired at all! My guide congratulated me, adding that in our day and age not many Septuagenarians would be capable of doing this! Just like Whymper, we spent here an intense half-hour which much have been one of the happiest moments of my life!

There were two contrasts with my previous climbs; both the Swiss and Italian summits used to be bare rock without snow, but this time they were completely covered in snow and ice. The Swiss summit had a razor-like ridge of hard snow. Normally twenty or more climbers could sit comfortably on top, but this time, there was not even room for a single climber to stand comfortably on it.

Ever since climbers have scaled the Matterhorn they have found several ravens circling around the summit and looking out for food, crying dolefully.

They are always friendly for they must know instinctively that the climbers are already beset with so many problems themselves that they do not constitute any danger. On this occasion, we could not see any of them.

As we reached the summit, the first party, including a young woman, were already starting on the descent. Another party of three were standing by a big cross on the Italian summit; they turned



# ACME TRANSPORT CO., LTD.

## *The Specialists in Transports to and from The Continent*

CITY WALL HOUSE

84-89 CHISWELL STREET, LONDON, E.C.1

Cables: Acmetrans London EC1.

Telex: 884005

Phone: 01-606 5721

ALSO AT: LONDON AIRPORT, MANCHESTER AND HARWICH

### *We Operate Direct Train Ferry and Container Services*

out to be South Koreans led by a young man looking like Sherpa Tensing, only younger. Shortly after our arrival two Japanese and a Japanese girl also arrived.

I have never had more wonderful weather or seen such an extensive panorama in the whole of my climbing career. Not a single cloud anywhere, the Monte Viso, 300 km. away, towards the South of France, stood out very clearly, while Mont Blanc could almost be touched by the hand. It is impossible to do justice to this view in writing.

My exhilaration was also mixed with some apprehension. Just as a credit transaction can only be regarded as successfully concluded when the cash is in the till, a climb is only over when you are back safely at the starting point. The descent from the Matterhorn is usually more dangerous and may take longer than the ascent and it is often during the descent that some of the terrible tragedies have taken place. As in the case of most other mountains, every step must be watched and a single slip could prove to be fatal.

It took thousands and thousands of years to shape the perfect forms of the Matterhorn, but there is no doubt that during the next thousands of years the ravages of time will have further effects. The Horn is totally exposed to the vagaries of the weather, storms, snow, ice,

heat and cold. The firm rock is slowly breaking up; I noticed that during the past 15 years already far more loose stones are lying on the rocks which are a danger both for the climbers themselves and those below who may be hit by falling stones.

As we started on our descent, we noticed a helicopter circling continuously overhead. My guide thought that it was looking for some climbers in trouble. On reaching the Solvay Hut, we found that two guides had called for the helicopter by walkie-talkie because a climber was ill in the hut. But he eventually recovered sufficiently to return unaided.

Our descent took place without incident, although it was long and tedious. With the tacit consent of my guide I took the liberty of merrily gliding down the fixed ropes although my backside collided in the process with a protruding rock and it took several weeks to shake off the effects.

On our return to the "Belvedere" — we were among the first parties to be back — I was warmly congratulated by all those present.

We were back in Macugnaga at midnight and my guide, as chief of the Rescue Organisation, was called out at once to recover the body of a young man who had just been killed on the Pizzo Bianco.

as late as the early Middle Ages. At the same time, however, more comfortable skates began to appear, made of wood and fitted with metal edges. Unlike ski-ing, skating as a sport was carried out in Europe, at least in some parts of the continent, already in the Middle Ages. In Holland, conditions were naturally favourable, and skating was very popular, as can be seen from many drawings and paintings by famous artists.

In the second half of the 18th century, skating became most fashionable, and poets vied with one another in singing its praises. Goethe was a great adherent and wrote in many of his works about the pleasure of the sport, so for instance in "Wilhelm Meister's Lehrjahre". At the beginning, it was men only who went skating, for it was deemed improper for women. The most they were allowed to do was to be pushed by men in special ice sleighs. Apart from this discrimination, however, there was no difference in state and class, dukes and labourers skated enthusiastically side by side. About the middle of the 19th century, after a resolute effort by some confident women, enthusiasm began to grow also amongst the weaker sex. In the course of time, skating began to develop into a fine art, especially under the influence of dancers. The ordinary "Sunday skater", though, still enjoys skating the same way he did then.

The third in the trio of old winter sports equipment is the toboggan. It, too, can look back on a fairly long history, for it is likely that one knew sleighs already before waggons. In the beginning, huntsmen dragged their prey simply on a skin or bark behind them, and from that developed the sleigh with first one runner and later two. Gradually one harnessed dogs, runs and later horses. One thing is certain, the sleigh became an important means of transport quite early on. Tobogganning became a popular and fashionable leisure activity in Zurich already in the 16th century. Later still, artificial tobogganning slopes were constructed in some places. In mountainous parts, tobogganning on icy slopes had been customary already before it became a sport. (One moved forward by using two small sticks on either side of the toboggan). Horse-drawn sleighs soon became part of social life in winter. Some of the magnificent sleighs have been preserved, a few also in the Historic Museum in St. Gall. Tobogganning was considered rather as peasant amusement, and it was not until the end of the 19th century that tobogganning clubs were founded. In 1883, the first tobogganning competition was held on the road between Davos and Klosters. The bobsleigh sport began to enjoy popularity in St. Moritz, and it was there that the first bobsleigh run was constructed. Later such runs were built in other winter sports resorts. The inventor of this sport, incidentally, was an American diplomat.

(Translated from the "Bodenseehefte")

## The story of ski, skate and toboggan

Few people know anything about the history of ski-ing. Winter Sports is spelled with capital letters in our part of the world. Ski-ing and skating have become a matter of course. But who would imagine that behind all the fibreglass, foam-lined boots and quilted suits, there is a history of some of the oldest tools in the world. Of course, they were not invented for sports, but to our ancestors they were weapons with which to fight the rigorous elements of winter.

Many literary documents exist (some dated from before Christ), and they prove the great age of snow-shoes and skis. The oldest known picture of a skier was found on a runic stone in Sweden. It depicts a hunting skier.

In the Far East, in China, Korea and also in Siberia, skis were known very early. The old Germanic/Nordic literary documentation is proof of the importance of ski-ing to Northern people. Thanks to this means, some of the legendary heroes achieved masterly speeds which still today would be worthy of Olympic distinction. These old accounts also tell of the first competitions in this kind of sport. Especially the Laplanders organised regular competitions quite early. According to reports, skis reached Central Europe well over 200 years ago. But they were kept as curiosities, and it was not until well into the 19th century that the advantages of these new tools were

recognised, especially by huntsmen and foresters. It was Nansen who became one of the great propagandists of ski-ing, for the whole success of his expedition to Greenland was due to the use of skis. He reported on it extensively in his book "With Snow-Shoes across Greenland". No wonder that the first ski clubs were founded immediately on publication of the book.

Unfortunately, the ski-ing pioneers in our part of the world lacked something very important, a technique. Every man had to collect his own experiences, and that is probably the reason why enthusiasm waned soon with some of them. It was not until daring men began some remarkable ascents in the mountains and especially after the famous crossing of the Bernese Oberland, on skis, that the conquest started in earnest and the ski became triumphant, a triumph which has gone on into the present epoch.

By no means less popular is skating, especially since artificial ice-rinks allow execution of this sport well into the spring. The history of the skate is at least as old as that of the ski, and equally varied and interesting. In lake-dwellings already one found bones which had no doubt served as skates. The lake-dweller pierced the bones and tied them to his "shoes" with straps. Such prehistoric skates were found in Switzerland, too. Incidentally, such bone skates were used