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Where dairy farming and tourism live in harmony

REIDERALP, a holiday resort virtually at the foot of the Great Aletsch glacier, yet situated on a high natural terrace bathed in sunshine, is right in the heart of some of the best hiking country in the Valais, a perfect blending of mountains and meadows.

Quiet, secluded pastures and enclosed lush grazing lands scattered over the face of the mountain echo to the hushed feeding of cattle and sheep. Riederalp, accessible by aerial cableway from Mörel, has remained true to Alpine tradition, and its guests can still enjoy the melodious bells of the herds as well as share in the customs of the herdsmen.

At the end of June herds from the villages of Ried, Greich and Goppisberg are driven up to the Riederalp for their 80-day, mid-summer grazing. Calves and beef cattle are then separated from the dairy cows, quartered in their stalls each evening for milking and the night's rest. Not all the milk can be processed in the Alpine dairies; some is sent to the valley by cableway.

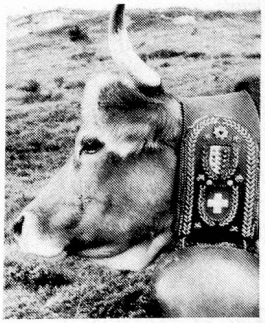
Cheese produced in summer is distributed to members of the co-operative, first in August and then on the day of the return drive to the villages. Every Thursday summer visitors to the dairies can have their "morning snack" of milk, cheese and Valaisan rye bread – a real chance to enjoy homemade products.

Highlight of the year for both local residents and tourists is the "Alpine Festival" at the beginning of August.

Cheese from the valleys of the Valais is renowned. It is especially suitable for raclette, the traditional Valaisan meal.

The cheese is prepared outdoors over an open fire or indoors on a charcoal grill, held towards the glowing coals until it begins to melt. Then it is scraped in servings on to a plate and eaten with boiled potatoes, gherkins and tiny onions.

The villagers claim that raclette is older than the Valaisan coat of arms, whose 13 stars symbolise the 13 districts constituting the canton since 1815 – and for the Valais just as characteristic . . .



When an Alpine cow feels off-colour and the vet is down below in the valley, it is time to call in the aerial ambulance. It looks quite hair-raising, but, let's face it, the breed are used to heights.