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Autor: [s.n.]
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Alphorn players add to the atmosphere

IT was 176 years ago that Berner Schultheiss von Mülinen and his friends first invited Alpine herdsmen and country folk to a festival at Unspunnen near Interlaken — a tradition that continues to this day.

Foreign occupation and political upheaval resulted in this truly Swiss festival assuming growing importance as a part of the nation's heritage. More than just a meeting of town and country, it came to symbolise the bond between government and people. With only a few gaps along the way it has survived the years and done much to revitalise Swiss folklore.

Preparations are already

well in hand for this year's Unspunnen Festival, which will be held from August 31 to September 6. Folkloristic groups will gather from the various mountain regions, and everyone will have the opportunity to "put the stone" up on the Höhematte or twirl to the tune of Swiss country waltz music.

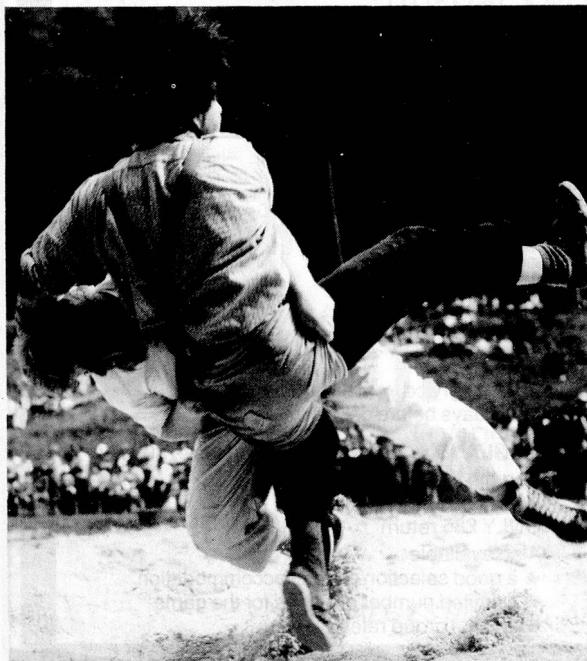
For the real lover of high-spirited folklore, the Saturday afternoon's folkdance is not to be missed. More than 1,000 country folk from all language areas and in full costume will be demonstrating their skill in dance and music.

On Sunday morning the best wrestlers and the strongest stone - putters

Energetic at



Folk dancers abound. These are from Geneva



Getting to grips in the "Hosedupf"



match their skills on the Unspunnen Meadow. The Unspunnen Stone weighs just under 185 lbs. and has been heaved off the ground and hurled through the air with varying degrees of success since 1805.

Once you manage to pick it up all by yourself you can throw it while on the run or from a standing position. The record is 3.4 meters. There are hopes that a new one will be set this September.

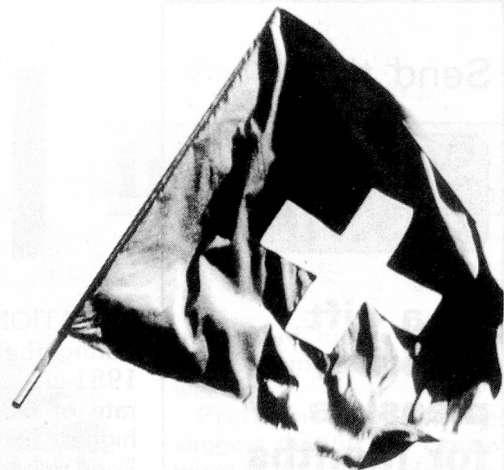
Swiss wrestling - or Schwingen - is one of the oldest Alpine games, and 200 wrestlers will look to their laurels in the sawdust circle. Sheer strength and lightning reflexes decide the

Hoselupf champion.

Meanwhile 5,000 participants in the festival will be getting ready for the parade. Alphorn players, flag twirlers, cowbell ringers, bull-whip crackers and costumed mountaineers will lead flower-bedecked cows up to Unspunnen.

And by the mighty ruins of an ancient castle, against a backdrop of forested heights towering above the waters of the Lütchine, with the snow-covered Jungfrau majestically presiding over all, the Swiss Costume and Alpine Festival reaches its climax with the folkloristic presentation of "The Voice of the Alps".

Unspunnen



Take it from the top ... A flag twirler shows his paces at Interlaken



Take it from the bottom ... Moment of truth on Unspunnen Meadow. More than 180 lb of stone ... and you're all on your own

