

**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:** - (1982)  
**Heft:** 1796

**Artikel:** The stars of Pontresina  
**Autor:** [s.n.]  
**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688503>

### **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:** 19.04.2026

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



Sean Connery

Locations for Fred Zinnemann's "Five Days One Summer" took the cast and crew to altitudes of up to 13,000ft in the Swiss Alps

**LAST** month a new film entitled "Five Days One Summer" opened in provincial cities throughout Britain. It is a love story set in the 1930s against the magnificent scenery of the Swiss Alps. A Scots doctor (played by Sean Connery), married and in his 50s, takes a girl half his age on a climbing holiday. At a hotel in the enclosed mountain community where they stay they register as man and wife.

Tourists gossip, villagers pry, and the young Alpine guide they engage falls in love with her. Thus the relationship with the older man, already beyond the social conventions, becomes the more vulnerable.

The two men undertake a particularly difficult climb and on their way back they have to negotiate a notoriously dangerous peak known as The Maiden. While the girl waits in a mountain hut for their return, the guide challenges the older man's right to her. During the descent one of them falls to his death.

It is clear that an accident has happened, that one of them may be dead but the girl doesn't know which one and although she cares about both of them, she is in love with one of them.

The story was one which fascinated director Fred Zinnemann, but the making of the film - at high altitude and in often dangerous conditions - is a story in itself.

## The stars of Po

"FIVE Days One Summer" is set in the southern Swiss Alps in the region of the Upper Engadine - a landscape of meadows and pine forests topped by the great Bernina range. The little township of Pontresina is one of several close to St Moritz which owe their livelihood mainly to tourism.

At 6,500 ft, Pontresina today has a population of only 3,000 but this is swelled in winter and summer by tens of thousands of tourists. The setting is sensational. Pontresina sits amid one of the noblest landscapes in the world.

Once he had his script and his setting, Fred Zinnemann began to wonder whether the Swiss authorities would allow him to shoot the film in the Engadine region of the Alps.

They are very strict about protecting their nature reserves, and would certainly balk at anything

that might interfere with their tourist trade. It would be necessary to seek various permissions, and because of Switzerland's intricate system of government these would have to be sought at several levels, from ministerial to local canton. It was a daunting prospect.

"Thanks to two people in particular - Peter Beale and Leonhard Gmür - these permissions were eventually received," says Zinnemann. He also credits Swiss climber and film maker Norman Dyhrenfurth with being an "ice-breaker" in terms of early negotiations with the Swiss authorities.

The decision to base at Pontresina offered not only all the necessary locations but the hotel accommodation and other back-up facilities a major movie unit requires besides.

Nevertheless, the Swiss autho-

rities we film ma damage side loca guarante that eve from ric even at woulc positel on som flying t of feet

In the film ma pared. I to tou boulder tually t the migh

Men spent th were at themse ropes, le abseiling



in Connery and Betsy Brantley play the lovers in the film

# Pontresina

... were so concerned that the  
... makers would not in any way  
... raze or despoil their country-  
... that they insisted on many  
... guarantees. These included one  
... t every bit of waste matter  
... mobile kitchens and latrines,  
... at the highest locations,  
... uld be removed and de-  
... sited in the town sewers, and  
... some sites this would mean  
... ng t down several thousands  
... fee, by helicopter.

... n the first weeks of June, the  
... makers trained and pre-  
... ed. Leisurely hikes gave way  
... tougher climbs in the  
... tigher foothills and even-  
... lly t ascents of ice faces below  
... mighty peaks.

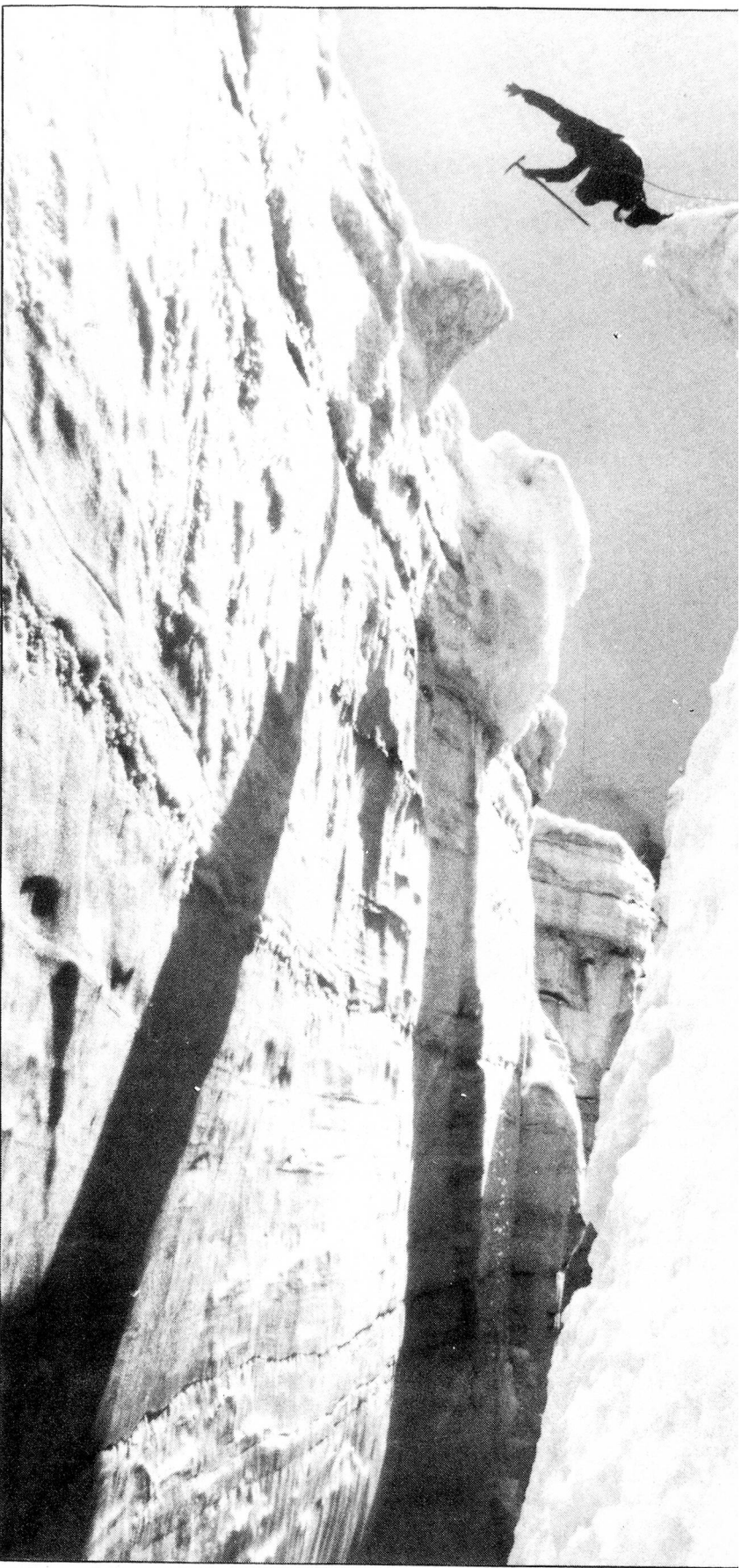
... Men and women who had  
... nt their lives at sea level and  
... e at home in cities found  
... mselves carrying ice axes and  
... es, learning the techniques of  
... iling and belaying, familiaris-

... ing themselves with pitons and  
... boots fitted with crampons, and  
... generally becoming aware that  
... survival on a mountain is a matter  
... of obeying rules.

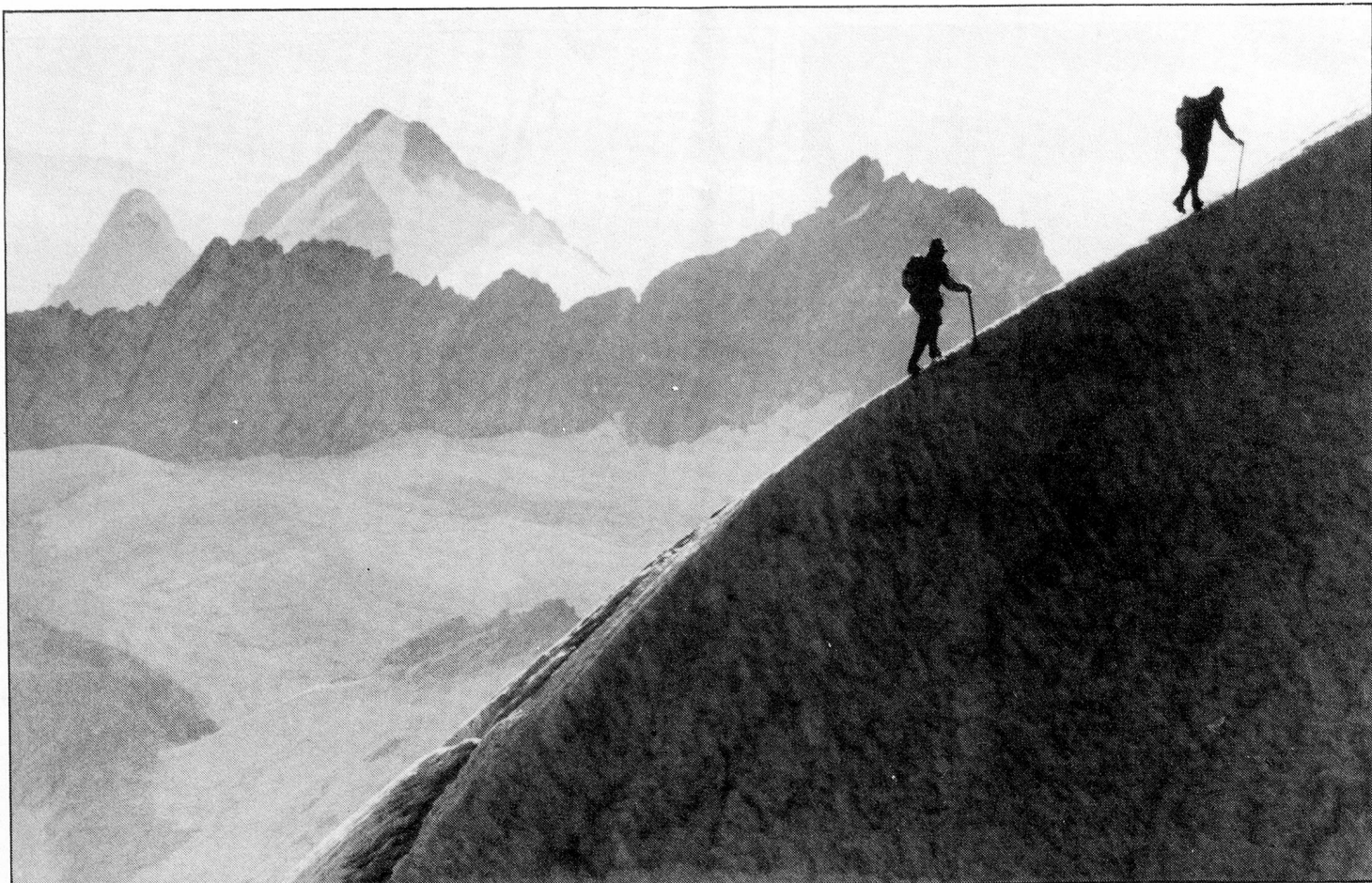
... Soon the film makers were a  
... familiar sight in Pontresina. The  
... initial shock to the villagers of  
... seeing a "prop" man carrying a  
... corpse up the main street or Sean  
... Connery in 1930s hiking gear  
... buying toothpaste wore off.  
... Movie people never quite blend  
... into a foreign place; they gain a  
... modicum of acceptance like  
... soldiers of an army on  
... manoeuvre.

... Although Swiss-German and  
... Italian are the generally under-  
... stood languages of the Upper  
... Engadine, the indigenous  
... language is Romansch which, like  
... Finnish, is unmasterable save by  
... superbrains. Thus cultural

**Turn to Page 16**



Douglas Meredith leaps across a crevasse during filming of "Five Days One Summer"



*A spectacular backdrop to one of the film's scenes*

## **From Page 15**

exchange except at the earthiest levels was limited.

It was difficult, for example, one morning at sunrise, to communicate with the Romansch-speaking Alpine shepherds – parchment skinned youths whose lives are spent in silence in the shadows of the peaks – when stagehands applied adhesive tape to the cowbells so that the sound of them, so appealing to the average tourist, would not ruin a shot!

Some scenes were filmed in the Roseg Valley, a wildlife conservation area where in the foothills chamoix and marmot abound and flowers, herbs and gungi grow in the pine glades. It was essential to cause the minimum of disturbance there.

To protect the wildlife the Swiss have banned all motorised transport; tourists must either walk or use a fleet of picturesque carts drawn by teams of dray horses.

But the first taste of filming above the snow line came with scenes in and around a mountain

hut at the summit of Diavolezza, the 11,000 ft high plateau close to Pontresina. To augment the workforce they recruited Alpine shepherds who spend the winters at high altitudes and appeared to be as impervious to the cold as their hardy cattle.

Snow storms are to be expected periodically even through the summer months in the Upper Engadine, and so nobody was surprised that in the middle of July a heavy snowfall transformed the tourist village from a suntrap into a Christmas card and made the mountains impenetrable. Sullen mists hung over the valley and filming moved into improvised studios where interior sets had been built for just such a contingency.

Yet an even grimmer side to the nature of mountains confronted the film makers face to face late in July when they were prospecting for a crevasse location. At the foot of the Bernina

glacier they stared in horror at the body of a man frozen solid in the ice. He was identified from articles in his knapsack as a police officer who had fallen down a steep crevasse 31 years earlier.

One scene called for Sean Connery to walk 300 metres down a slope on a glacier known to have crevasses hidden beneath coatings of fresh snow. Although safety personnel probed the area and placed luminous markers at danger spots these were used only in rehearsals. Before the actual take the markers were taken away. Connery later described it as "the loneliest walk I've ever taken.

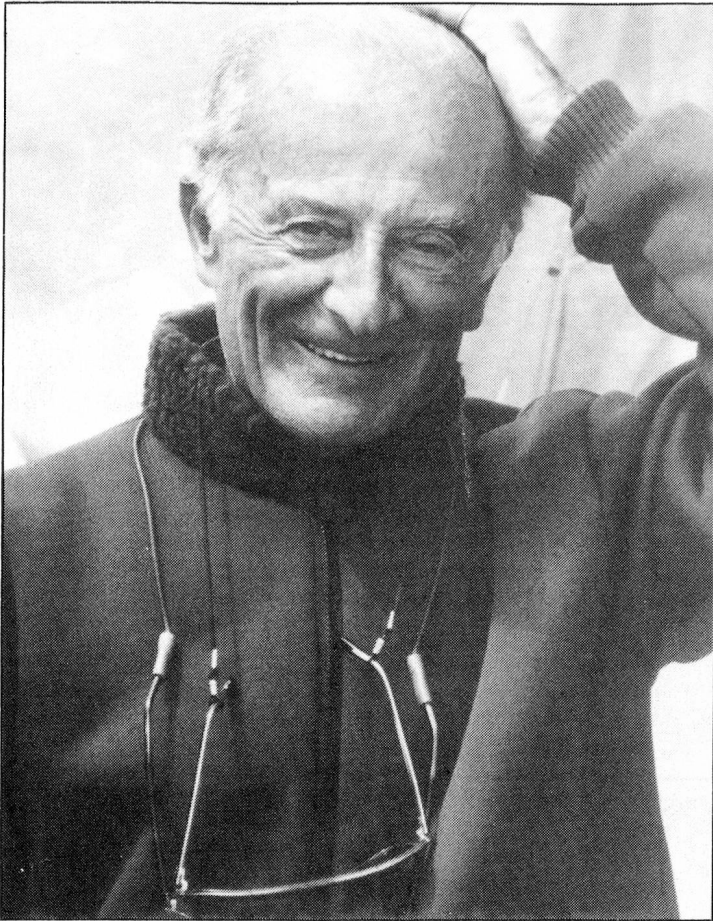
"I knew there were expert mountaineers with the unit and the safety people had done their probes but I also knew that a few inches on either side of the path I had to take there were 90ft caverns. It was all very hairy.

"During the silence of the take I could hear the sound of the ice

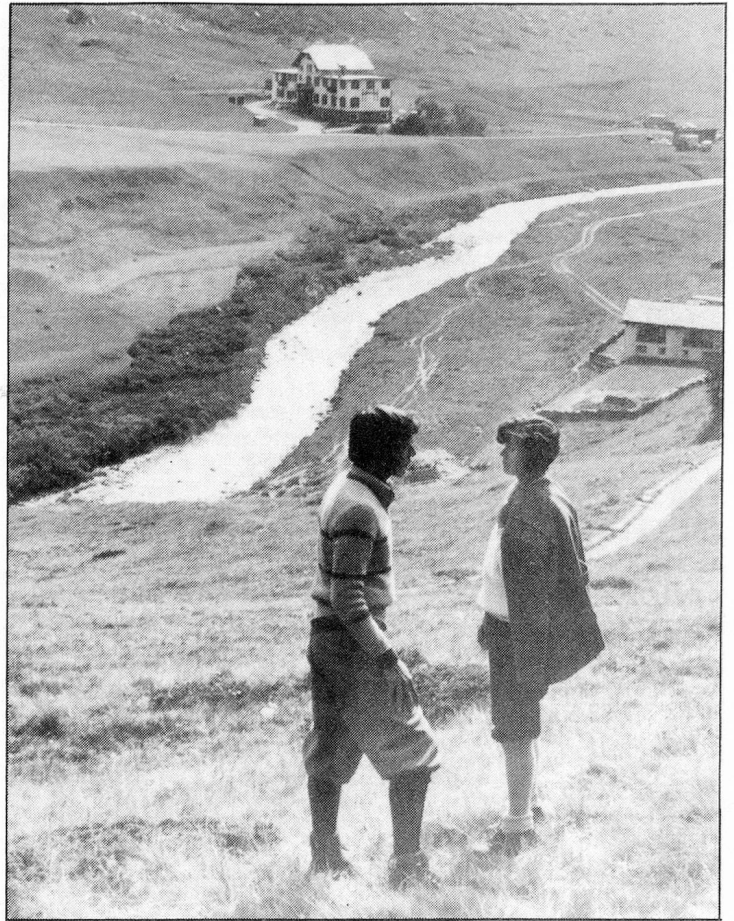
moving underneath me and behind me in the peaks. I could hear it shifting all the time. At any moment I thought the ground below could open or there could be a rock fall or an avalanche from behind. It was consoling to be moving towards the camera and the rest of the gang."

Something else that made life less comfortable for him than it might have been was that unlike the unit whose mountain gear and climbing boots were modern, his were authentic to the 1930s period, and it was a handicap to be on the mountains with equipment developed 50 years ago.

Even the skilled climbers found they couldn't perform as well with the 1930s equipment. For instance, the spikes (called crampons) on the boots were inferior to modern ones which dig into the ice face better. Techniques such as abseiling (going down over rocks with ropes) have been improved, but the actors



Fred Zinnemann, director of "Five Days One Summer"



Lambert Wilson and Betsy Brantley

had to learn the old techniques.

By late August it was clear that the short summer of the Engadine was giving place to the even more changeable face of autumn, and this was making the struggle to complete the main crevasse sequence even tougher.

A further problem for the film makers was that sites reconnoitred, prepared and scheduled into the filming could deteriorate in contrary weather and become too dangerous to work on so that another site had to be found. Sometimes a snowscape that had sparkled in pure whiteness one day would resemble an ocean of burnt sugar the next due to deposits of Sahara sand from the overnight airsteams.

It was also necessary to find some way in which to shoot the scenes of the climatic tragedy of The Maiden, the treacherous, needle-shaped rock from which in the final sequence one of the two climbers falls to his death.

But The Maiden is not on any map. Usually, in this business of make-believe, if something you want for your film does not exist

you build it. But you cannot build a mountain. So it had to be represented by a composite of mountains, each one of which would contribute an impressive feature – Piz Castello its magnitude, Piz Badile (The Flat Iron) its great escarpment of rock with drops of thousands of feet on either side, Piz Palu its ridge of solid ice, the Largo its granite pinnacle. Thus a composite of these settings provided the backdrop for the sequence of the fatal fall.

Movie making is a composite of talents, and film directors have been likened to orchestral conductors. After a long career which could well have rested on its achievements, what had lured Zinnemann at 74 to this vast amphitheatre of the Alps to make a movie whose demands might well have daunted younger men?

He says: "I think that if something has haunted you for so long, it has done so for a very good reason. I kept thinking about it. Mountains have been a part of my life so, in a sense, I suppose it was a self-indulgence."

Unsere Produkte sind international bekannt!

**SCHMIDLIN**

Hans Schmidlin AG 4147 Aesch (Basel)  
Fenster-und Fassadenbau Telephone 061/78 11 11

**Unsere Tochtergesellschaft, Hans Schmidlin (UK) Limited sucht auf Mitte Januar 1983 eine tüchtige zweisprachige**

**SEKRETAERIN**

Gute Deutsch- und Englischkenntnisse, Sekretärinnenausbildung mit deutscher und/oder englischer Stenographie werden erwartet. Zusätzliche buchhalterische Kenntnisse wären ein Vorteil.

Wir sind ein fortschrittliches Unternehmen, offerieren 4 Wochen Urlaub, gutes Salär und angenehmes Arbeitsklima in einem kleinen Team.

Wir freuen uns auf Ihre schriftliche Bewerbung mit Lebenslauf.

**HANS SCHMIDLIN (UK) LTD.  
126 Cornwall Road  
London SE1 8TQ  
Tel. 01-928 6249/60**