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Sion, city of the twin

THE impression received on approaching Sion is one of grandeur. The castle ruins of Tourbillon and its twin fortress, Valère, bestow a sense of durability on the capital of the Valais.

Both give eloquent expression to its strong defensive position endowed by nature. Sion was proclaimed a bishopric in 585, and after the year 999 its episcopal masters were also temporal lords with a girded sword.

Tourbillon was built by Bishop Boniface of Challant at the close of the 13th Century. A conflagration destroyed both it and the city below in 1788. At the turn of the last century, "Festung Valeria" was restored, its central sections today a museum.

The Collegiate Church, and former cathedral, on the hill dates from the early 11th Century. Here, Romanesque and Gothic styles blend harmoniously.

In time of war both Valère and Tourbillon have repeatedly offered the inhabitants of the countryside refuge. Along the northerly hill, the zigzag line of Sion's defensive battlements are still visible, at the so-called Gate of the Dogs (Hundeturm), the Majorie, the residence of episcopal officials; and the "Tour des Sorciers", the Gate of the Witches, behind whose walls no fewer than 200 witches and sorciers found death in 1428.

From Valère the eye sweeps over a sunlit countryside



"Tous Vents" sector of old Sion seen from the Rue de Lausanne with the Collegiate Church and Valère

silhouetting the All Saints' Chapel between the twin hills. In spite of modern expansion, the city reveals its medieval character in a maze of narrow lanes, like a gabled garland.

But it is open towards the west, and not just to the invigorating breeze. French charm is also wafted over it. The days are long since gone when children who spoke French at play were caned.

In fact, Sion's extensive

vineyards lead one to imagine that business is often concluded over a friendly glass and that compromise is a companion to politics.

A tour of the sights

In 1961, at the edge of the Sitter's erosion cone, in the "Petit Chasseur", archaeologists discovered the earliest known evidence of Sion's settlement – one of the most important sites of the Neolithic age (3,000-1,500 BC) in Alpine regions.

In the schoolyard of the secondary school for girls several Stone Age monuments have been reconstructed (dolmen, graves, monoliths). Notwithstanding such pagan witnesses, Christianity has been at home here since the fourth century, for the oldest Christian inscription (377AD) in Switzerland is found right behind the heavily carved portal of the town hall in Avenue du Grand Pont, under which the Sitter flows.

The orange-coloured town hall itself is a magnificent building from the 17th century, with its domed tower, rich wood carvings and wrought iron embellishments.

The latter, of course, are much more delicately executed on the house of the nobility. They extend along Grand Pont and through its sidestreets, divulging something of the pride, wealth and status of their builders.

Hemmed in by the Rue de Conthey and the Rue de Lausanne is the most elegant

building in the Valais, the Supersaxo mansion, built during the Renaissance but late Gothic in appearance.

The rival of the Supersaxos, Cardinal Matthew Schriner, left few architectural monuments – among them St Theodule's Church close by the second cathedral of the Valaisan capital, the Church of Our lady.

It is the youngest of the medieval churches in Switzerland. The size of its belfry mirrors the defensive milieu of the hills, and its Treasury is impressive.

Return to Valère

Leaving the centre of the city along the Grand Pont we roam through the old sector this side of the Sitter. Moving uphill through the Lombardy quarter, we look inside house No. 3, the "Apothecary Shop of Johannes Uffem Bort". Frescoes (1547) depicting the paradise cycle were restored a few years ago.

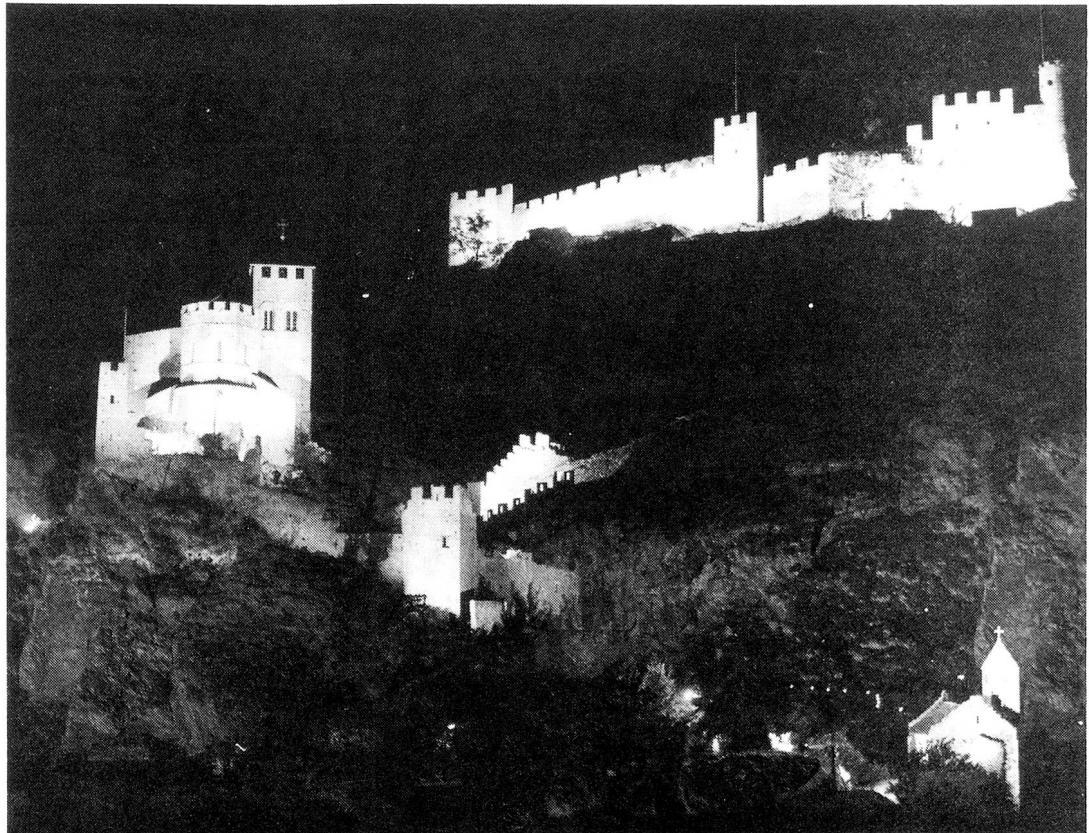
Then, through "Tous Vents" and the "Cité" of the Middle Ages we again approach "Valère", with our way up along the Schlossgasse going past the Majorie, now the Museum of Fine Arts, and the Archeological Museum.

The fossil imprints of the saurians found in the vicinity of Emosson have now been placed on exhibition here. On Valère, 40 rooms offer a glimpse into history and prehistoric times, while the oldest playable organ (1390) in the world annually resounds during the "International Festival of Old Organs".

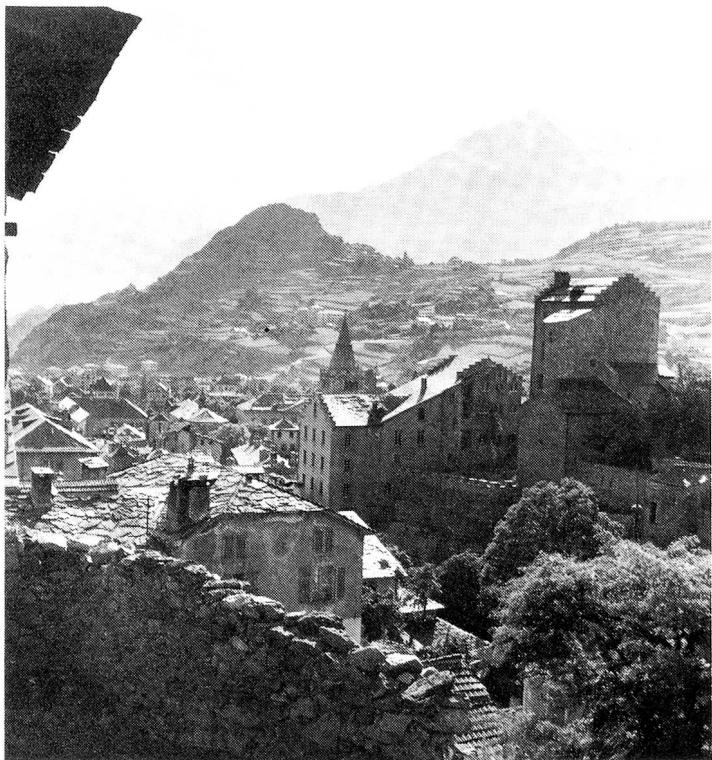
hills

In July and August the sounds of another festival are heard, those of Tibor Vargas. In Sion, this festive city, the only bell that remains silent is the one held by the devil in the sculptured stone of St Theodule's.

But St Theodule, the patron saint of the Valais whose statue adorns the fountain in front of the Majorie, remains deaf to certain "entreaties and supplications". The legendary vat of St Jodern, once offering as much free wine as the heart desired, is empty!



Above, lighted landmarks, Valère and Tourbillon, preside over the city at night. Below, left, the Rue du Grand Pont, under which flows the Sitter. Below, right, The Majorie (right), first mentioned in 1221, is now the Fine Arts Museum



Salon's anniversary

SWITZERLAND'S Salon des Vacances will this year celebrate its 25th anniversary in new surroundings.

Following differences with the Comptoir Suisse authorities at the Palais de Beaulieu, Lausanne, where it has been held for 24 years, the Salon is moving to Montreux, where it will be staged at the congress centre from March 5-13.

The Salon's organisers say that 50 countries and regions have booked space, including Mexico for the first time.

A section will be devoted to trekking and other sections will feature boating, camping and caravanning.

Bookings down

HOTEL overnight bookings in Switzerland dropped by 5.5 per cent during the 1982 summer season. But the Swiss Federal Statistics Bureau says the total - 19,600,000 - was still higher than the average over the last 10 years.

Foreign tourists were responsible for nearly three-quarters of the drop. Visitors from Germany, Switzerland's biggest tourism catchment area, were down by 14 per cent during summer.

But there were increases in tourists from the US and Britain, encouraged by favourable dollar and sterling exchange rates.

Hotel re-opens

AFTER considerable renovation work on its imposing 19th century style building the Hotel Excelsior at Montreux is to re-open on April 1.

The 80 bedrooms and suites, all facing the lake with a balcony or a terrace, have been refur-



THE wooden chalet (and the cuckoo clock) must epitomise every English person's idea of Switzerland. Perhaps that's why Interhome is promoting chalet holidays to the British public.

The chalet in Brienz in the Bernese Oberland (pictured here) was built 250 years ago.

It was renovated in 1970 and

comprises a living room with open fireplace, dining table and TV; kitchenette with electric cooker and fridge; and separate WC.

On the upper floor there is a double bedroom, a bathroom with WC and a large balcony, and there is also a room in the attic (with sloping ceilings) with a

further three beds.

The chalet costs only £155 per week for five people during May (ie only £31 per person), rising to £218 per week in August.

It is just one of 2,631 properties which Interhome has available throughout Switzerland but it must surely be one of the most picturesque.

bished to the standards of a five-star luxury hotel.

A French restaurant, two bars and three reception rooms for cocktails and banquets have been incorporated in a "Belle Epoque" framework.

The restaurant, Le Yaka, with a panoramic view across the lake, invites the gourmet to taste the fine sea food dishes and the fish specialities.

There are also six meeting rooms for seminars, a gallery for paintings and objets d'art, a boutique and a hairdresser's shop, a covered, heated swimming pool, a gaming room and, as the latest thing in novelties, the Denyse Gardinier Health and Beauty

Centre, with a dietetic restaurant.

The originality and the techniques of the Denyse Gardinier treatment are unique in Europe. A cure consists of physio-therapeutic care, aesthetic relaxation care and a dietetic program adapted to the needs of each client by the dietetician of the health and beauty centre.

Tourism consultant

SWISS-born Michel Tondeur is giving up his post as president and worldwide general manager of Wagons-Lits Tours International in Paris and is returning

to Switzerland to set up as a consultant.

Mr Tondeur held his post with WLT for 11 years and will leave at the end of March with good 1982 results behind him - a 30 per cent rise in profits and a network in 650 offices located in 34 countries in most parts of the world.

He has spent 35 years in the travel trade, having previously held management posts with Kuoni and Hotelplan in Switzerland.

As a consultant he will make his experience and connections available to the entire tourism industry in Switzerland and other countries.

Stamps idea takes a licking

AFTER 60 years in England, retired Swiss caterer Mr Walter Zuber (83) aims to put his stamp on matters.

Mr Zuber, who lives on the Isle of Wight, has designed seven stamps illustrating beauty spots around the island.

He says, "If these stamps were posted on letters they would be the loveliest and cheapest advert for the island."

However, the Post Office stood between Mr Zuber and his promotional plans. Although islands like Jersey and the Isle of Man have their own stamps, they are virtually self-governing bodies in other senses too. The Isle of Wight is not in the same situation.

The island's director of tourism has proposed an interesting alternative, though. He suggests that Walter's stamps could be used as decorative stamps alongside the official postage stamps.

READER'S LETTER

I WOULD very much like to meet other Suisses Romandes in the Bristol area.

Are there any French-speaking Swiss in or near the city who are interested in forming a group meeting once a month? If so, please contact me. — **Mrs Yolande Studer, 4 Henleaze Park Drive, Bristol BS9 4LH. (Phone 0207 629412).**

MANY people have the impression that listening to shortwave radio broadcasts calls for advanced technical ability, a great deal of patience and a big bank balance.

Indeed, if one wishes to pursue shortwave as a serious hobby, searching the bands for the hardest-to-get little stations on the other side of the earth, these three factors do play their part.

But nothing could be further from the truth when it comes to listening in Britain to the programming of Swiss Radio International.

SRI ensures coverage of Europe on a reliable basis via three transmitters operating in the 31, 49 and 75 metre bands.

Virtually all major radio manufacturers offer simple and inexpensive receivers capable of picking up at least the 49 metre band, which is sometimes referred to as the "Europa Band," especially on the Continent.

Tune to the frequency 6.165 MHz in the 49 metre band and you'll find SRI on the air from 6am until 10.45pm GMT.

For those with more sophisticated receivers, try 9.535 MHz in

Keep in touch via the Europa Band

the 31 metre band. This provides excellent reception of SRI, especially in the North and Northern Ireland.

The 75 metre band frequency of 3.985 MHz is admittedly less common on simple radios. But if your receiver includes it, you'll find good SRI reception during the evening.

Any radio dealer should be able to give you specific advice when choosing a receiver capable of shortwave reception.

While most modern radios can

pick up SRI's signal using only the built-in whip antenna, some form of external aerial may be needed to assure the best reception. Here again, a radio shop should be able to help.

And of course, SRI is always ready to furnish specific information if you cannot obtain satisfaction locally.

Just write to: Swiss Radio International, CH-3000 Berne.

Good listening!

**Bob Zanotti
of SRI's English Service**

Voluntary insurance

A NUMBER of readers were concerned after reading "Swiss old age and invalidity insurance — Discrimination against Swiss women abroad" in the February issue of the Swiss Observer.

We should like to assure all those insured under the voluntary scheme of the AHV/AVS that they are not affected in any way by the new interpretation of the law. This concerns only the wives of Swiss employed abroad by firms in Switzerland who are in-

sured in Switzerland under the compulsory insurance scheme.

So please don't worry. We are sorry if we have caused you concern.

MM

★ ★ ★

FORMER Czechoslovak economist Ota Sik, who was an architect of the short-lived liberal reforms of the "Prague spring" of 1968, has been granted Swiss citizenship.

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