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Cheeses from Switzerland

CHEESE is not so much an industry in Switzerland as a way of life. The large cheeses are not made by big factories, but by small village dairies throughout the country – some 1,600 in fact.

Most of these dairies are family concerns producing about three to four Emmental cheeses a day. Often the husband will have two or three helpers while his wife runs the dairy shop selling all kinds of milk products.

When Victor Hugo said “Le Suisse trait sa vache et vit paisiblement” he seemed to imply that romantic charm was the main characteristic of the Swiss milk industry. He could not have been more mistaken. Scientific research has played a big part, combining technical know-how with tradition.

About 1,000 years ago, a Swiss cow weighed no more than 650lbs. Today its weight is at least double, and the milk yield has gone up accordingly.

To produce one Emmental cheese weighing 120kg, about 1,500 litres of fresh milk is required, roughly the yield of 80 cows.

Since the average farmer has only 10 to 15 cows, it stands to reason that the milk must come from six to eight farms. The farmers, from necessity, have formed small cooperatives. There are about 150 village cooperative

dairies in the country.

It is reckoned that there are some 86,000 farmers in Switzerland. Between them, they own 850,000 cows. More than 8,000 people out of a population of six and a half million inhabitants have jobs in the dairy industry.

Nearly one-third of the country's annual milk production is used for cheese-making. And every year, roughly 80,000 tons of cheese are produced, more than half for export. Swiss cheese is sold in well over 100 countries, though most of it goes to Europe and North America.

Because of the significance of cheese production, the Swiss Cheese Union was founded in 1934 to coordinate the output of small dairies. It markets virtually all the cheese produced for sale abroad, while ensuring sufficient quantities for home needs.

The Cheese Union maintains high quality standards which have made Swiss cheese famous. The discipline governing dairy production has resulted in 90 per cent of the hard cheese delivered to the Swiss Cheese Union nowadays being accepted as first class, a very high proportion indeed.

In this country, the Swiss Cheese Union is represented by Cheeses from Switzerland at Banbury, Oxfordshire, who look

By
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after the marketing of the five main cheeses from Switzerland in the UK – Emmental, Gruyère, Sbrinz, Appenzell and Royalp, each name being followed by the word Switzerland.

In spite of the excellent cheeses produced in Britain, sales of Swiss cheese have gone up. Last year, 900 tons of cheese was imported from Switzerland, and the trend is still upwards.

The Cheese Union's symbol and logo is an alphorn player

standing on a cheese. It has been the mark of good quality for many years and in this connection the Cheese Union has always supported the instrument.

When the longest alphorn in the world was presented, the Cheese Union became its sponsor. The alphorn will testify throughout the world not only to the outstanding quality of Swiss cheese but also to the love of tradition and patriotic attachment of the Swiss.

The longest alphorn in the world on tour in Britain

IN May 1984, the Swiss Cheese Union brought to Britain the three-man team of alphorn players, Arthur Lamy, Adolf Dettlinger and Ernst Zuberbuehler. They are professionals and recognised as the world's top players.

They had with them the longest alphorn ever made, and what a sight it was in the busy cities – all 22 metres of it!

Arthur Lamy from Lindau, Canton Zurich, a top-class player and folklore enthusiast, first had the idea of an outsize instrument in 1975 and commissioned the longest alphorn to be constructed but the record was broken a year later with the Pilatus World Record Alphorn.

And so the three musicians arrived in Sheerness in Kent for their 12-day tour in the Cheeses from Switzerland Campaign.

They had with them the giant

alphorn and three “normal” instruments – two cowbells, trumpet, mouth-organ and bowl for “Talerschwingen” (a coin is spun round the inside of an earthenware basin by rhythmically rotating the vessel, thus producing a musical sound).

The trio wore the traditional costume of Central Switzerland: embroidered black smock, black trousers and porkpie hat. They travelled by minibus and were accompanied by Mrs Sally Pernet, wife of the Swiss Centre Restaurants' executive chef, André Pernet.

Their programme was a heavy one. The next day, they took part in the annual trade reception and Cookery Challenge presentation at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London's Park Lane, where

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Cheeses from Switzerland

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Cheeses from Switzerland presented Janet and Friends.

The welcome was given by Mr Maurice Johnson, managing director of Cheeses from Switzerland.

The outstanding item on the ballroom floor was the appearance of their official alphorn blower team. Their performance brought them rapturous applause.

There is an interesting sequel to this event: The winner in this nationwide competition for the Cook of the Year, organised by Cheeses from Switzerland, was a student from the Luton Catering College, Christine Rudkin.

Her creation of a Swiss cheese recipe was a salmon surprise, a poached salmon steak filled with Emmental cheese and served with a cheesy hollandaise sauce.

Miss Rudkin is now working at the Swiss Centre Restaurants as commis chef.

Next day began their tour of cheese-selling centres, starting with the Swiss Centre in London, where Capital Radio was present at one of the Centre's renowned Swiss breakfasts.

London's oldest cheese specialists, Paxton and Whitfields, gave them a good reception as part of the Jermyn Street Festival.

At Selfridges, the Army and Navy Stores and others, traffic was so dense that the players

were hard put to perform.

In the evening, there was a Fondue Fun Do at the Swiss Centre's Locanda restaurant. The Swiss national dish came into its own, not to speak of the excellent Swiss wines and all the entertainment.

The following day, the players set out on their provincial tour, starting at Asda Superstore in High Wycombe, where they entertained customers inside and the general public outside.

Then it was Manchester's turn where they attended a trade meeting at the Britannia Hotel. Kendal Milne department store had laid on a superb show of Swiss cheeses and proved generous hosts to the team. Of course, cheeses from Switzerland were much in evidence at every centre the musicians appeared.

They then journeyed on to Birmingham with Rackhams department store as the main centre of attraction, followed by another trade reception in the evening.

The Birmingham Evening Mail published a picture of the giant alphorn being carried across the road – what an extraordinary sight!

Back in London, they visited some smaller food stores, like Tylers in Motcomb Street where again they played outside the shop to entertain the passers-by and were later entertained themselves to lunch.

A special event was the visit to



Bartholdi's in Charlotte Street. The whole family were assembled, and the Swiss were treated to special refreshments. How pleased the late Mr Bartholdi and his wife would have been!

They started the Swiss food shop – and for many years a restaurant – which is now run by the third generation of Bartholdis.

Everywhere the three alphorn players and their entourage went they caused a sensation. One may be used to kilts and saris,

punk outfits and African robes but to see and hear three alphorn players in attractive costumes is certainly out of the ordinary.

The biggest sensation was caused by the roof-top concert on the last day. Adolf Dettinger played his horn from the roof of the Charing Cross Hotel while Arthur Lamy and Ernst Zuberbuehler blew their horns from the top of the Swiss Centre – a double concerto audible for miles!

To get the alphorn to the top of the Swiss Centre tower block it had to be hauled up with ropes on the outside.

It was the first time such an event has been attempted. No wonder television crews, radio and press reporters were at the Swiss Centre in large numbers. In all the Swiss team appeared three times on television and three times on the radio with audiences running into millions.

There can be no doubt, the three artists made their mark. The Swiss Cheese Union scored a hit. Cheeses from Switzerland could not have been promoted in a more impressive manner than by sending their symbol in person, so to speak, to demonstrate the high quality, not only of their product but also their high standards of marketing and customer service.

The alphorn of today – and its scope

THE alphorn is usually pictured as a long conical object curved at the end, in fact earlier versions, which have practically disappeared today, were straight.

There are also some examples of folded alphorns, but the alphorn as it is known in Switzerland today is curved and conical.

It originated in nature itself – a young fir or pine tree, crooked or straight, growing on a hill or mountain side, was cut down, peeled, cut to size and halved. The two halves were hollowed out until the sides were even and thin. They were then glued

together and bound with birch bark.

Today it is rare to have an instrument from a tree grown naturally in the right shape. The best pinewood or spruce is now used, and the horn is made in two, three or even four pieces which will fit into each other.

This allows easy transport – in former times, the instrument was very much tied to residence!

The binding is mostly of split "peddigrohr" (rattan). Earlier alphorns were blown without mouthpieces. Nowadays, these are made of hard beechwood.

One is often asked if all instru-

