

# Swiss british centre

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## SWISS BRITISH CENTRE

"The Home for Swiss Living Abroad" at Dürrenäsch in Switzerland was created just after the war, to which, a few years later, another centre was added, "THE SWISS BRITISH CENTRE". Both organisations are non-commercial and non-profit-making. They have been visited, in the past, by thousands of Swiss from all over the world, by members of the British Townswomen's Guilds, British educationalists, school children and students.

At the moment, till end of March 1969, they are organising educational visits for privileged and under-privileged children or students from Great Britain and the Commonwealth, which are highly subsidised by private means; if successful they will be continued next year. The charge is £1 per person per day for board and lodging. The children or students must be accompanied by one adult per 10 youths (or their parents), and they must make their own beds.

The trip is organised by the participants themselves and co-ordinated by Dr. E. Wiget in London (1 Umbria Street, S.W.15, 01-788 3338).

One adult per 10 youths is kept free of charge as to board and lodging except for travelling costs as he or she has to take full responsibility for the children or students during their stay and to continue their education in Switzerland. All extras (drinks and special excursions as well as the return fare from Great Britain or the Commonwealth to Dürrenäsch) have to be paid for by all participants including the accompanying adults. Party tickets are available.

These visits should serve educational purposes, for which leave of absence may be granted by the authorities during the school term.

Dürrenäsch, though a small typically Swiss village, lies within easy reach of all our main educational, technical and cultural centres. Moreover it is a study centre in itself and programmes are arranged for groups of people (children, students, educationalists and professionals with or without their dependents) according to their wishes and finances.

We can easily accommodate groups of 20—50 people at the time or more as there are over 100 beds available though very few are single rooms. The Centre is run on hotel lines. All rooms are comfortable and well heated, and food is excellent. Meals are taken in the main building.

The following is an account by the British educational officer who accompanied the first group of children. A second party left on 6th December.

The Swiss British Centre at Dürrenäsch (Aargau), for some years now, has been a *pied-à-terre* for many

Swiss living abroad. It recently opened its doors to eleven British children ranging in age from 13 to 17 years, who are all in the care of the London Borough of Camden's Children's Department.

The group laid the foundation-stone for a new venture planned by this Swiss British Centre which is aimed at promoting international friendship and understanding between children from all kinds of backgrounds, from those at public schools to less fortunate children such as these, many of whom have spent a large proportion of their lives in children's homes.

The Centre at Dürrenäsch is a true village within a village — it incorporates several homes, some for families, others for large study groups, a farm producing much of the food for the Home, and a hunting-lodge, all nestling some 1,850 feet above sea-level in the enchanting Homberg countryside, set against the distant backcloth of the Juras, which, sadly, remained swathed in an ethereal November mist for the whole of our stay.

We spent much of our time walking in this beautiful woodland — to the farm, where we were refreshed by ice-cold, home-made cider, to the hunting-lodge, and to the little village-school at Wannenhof, where the English children, used to vast secondary schools, were astounded and not a little amused to find the whole school — 22 pupils and one teacher — all hard at work in the same classroom.

On the remaining days, we ventured farther afield — to Basle, to Berne, to Zurich, and, most memorably, to Lucerne and the Rigi. Leaving behind the mist which thinly veiled the shores of Lake Lucerne, we emerged from the cable-car into the brilliant sunshine on the upper slopes . . . The cold, crisp air; the sea of cloud below us; the pristine, awe-inspiring grandeur of the Jungfrau, the Eiger and the Moench far away to the South; closer at hand, the silent army of pine-trees standing smartly to attention; the uncanny silence broken only by a faint tinkling of cowbells . . . a totally unforgettable, riveting experience.

But, like all good things, the week at Dürrenäsch came to an end. I simply cannot express the happiness and delight we all derived from this holiday, but perhaps this little incident will: the guide who showed us round the *Bundeshaus* in Berne told us that to be sure of returning to Switzerland, we must not forget to scratch the two bears standing guard at the entrance. From then on, 13-year-old Sheila, to make absolutely certain of coming back, scratched every single bear she could lay her hands on: I'm sure she expressed the feeling of us all.

If this first holiday is in any way indicative of the success of the scheme as a whole, then I know eleven young people who would vote it an unqualified 'hit'.

SUSAN WALTERS.

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