

News from the mountains

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NEWS FROM THE MOUNTAINS

Europe's highest located studio at some 6,300 feet above sea level on the Lauchernalp in the Lötschental is the home of the Valais artist Albert Nyfeler (83) who for over sixty years has devoted his art to the beauty of the Alps. Eight years ago, when he decided to build his studio home of massive granite high above the tree level, close to the mountains' everlasting snow, he remarked to his friends who warned against the project: "The delicious, healthy mountain air is life-giving. Why should the good fortune not be mine at 90 or more to paint my beloved mountains right on the spot?"

A proud son of the Alps was born four and a half years ago at Ottenbach, a village known for the world's largest kennels where Saint Bernards are bred. This region is called the "Säuliamt" because it used to be famous for its farrows, and therefore the dog's name is Onar vom Säuliamt. Outside of Switzerland, this may be somewhat perplexing and when "Life" magazine recently published a colour picture of the dog with the traditional little cask of brandy attached to the collar and wearing a wide-brimmed Texan hat the introduction read "Onar von Säuliamt". The picture had been taken on the occasion of President Johnson's inauguration in Washington. As a matter of fact, the beautiful Saint Bernard went to America two years ago on the first flight Zurich-Montreal-Chicago as a present from Swissair to the Mayor of Chicago, and Onar took part in the inauguration festivities with the delegation of the Chicago city police.

In memory of Suvorov, the Russian field marshal who, in 1799, ousted the French from Northern Italy and in a bold autumn campaign led his army through the Alps, Georges Bernet, a young catholic priest from Adliswil near Zurich, and his friends, every year, undertake Alpine expeditions on horseback. Their mounts are Iceland ponies, of a breed which was also known in Europe over one thousand years ago, and they are well acquainted with rocks and ice. Last year, the horsemen were en route four days from Altdorf on the Lake of Lucerne to Ilanz in the Grisons. Their journey took them also over the historic Alpine passes of Panix and Prugel which in modern times had never seen a saddle horse. The young vicar conceived the idea when he was teaching history and geography. He was so impressed by the Alpinistic feats of Suvorov's army that he felt his pupils should experience what this meant. For the Year of the Alps, Bernet plans to lead a group of at least six riders over a scenic trail from North-Eastern Switzerland to the Grisons and Central Switzerland.

Some 800 miles on skis were recently covered by a group of five mountain guides from four countries — Australia, France, Italy and Switzerland. They started at Vent (Austria) and chose routes seldom used in winter which took them via Italy and Switzerland finally to Grenoble (France). They were en route five weeks, always on skis and several times had to climb above 12,000 feet.

Over 250 young mountain climbers between 16 and 22 years of age have already registered for the junior training course, sponsored by the Swiss Alpine Club and the Swiss Federal Gymnastics and Sports College to be held this summer at the Alpine Centre of Arolla (Valais).

The Year of the Alps in the Light of International Mountaineering (by Fritz Erb). A fine example of co-operation and interaid was given on 5th and 6th February by the Swiss-Italian action to rescue the four mountain guides from Macugnaga, Italy, who in the Monte Rosa East flank were caught in a blizzard at about 12,000 feet. The climbers, who were in best physical condition and technical experts, had scaled the mighty wall from the Rifugio Marinelli (10,170 ft.) in one go and were just below the Grenzgißel (over 13,500 ft.) when the radio communication with Macugnaga broke off and they were forced by the storm and a temperature of -30° C. to bivouac. Naturally, the people of Macugnaga were greatly worried. Zermatt was asked to send a rescue party, and this was immediately done — it was during the Gornergrat Derby — but luckily it proved unnecessary in the end. Thanks to the co-operation between the Swiss glacier pilot Martignoni, the Zermatt guide René Arnold and four colleagues of the missing group, the communication was restored despite the snowstorm and cold. With his helicopter, Martignoni circled around the Grenzgißel and the Dufour Spitze (15,217 ft.) until he detected the men from Macugnaga climbing in the rocks just below the summit. Then, completely disregarding the storm, he flew the Zermatt guide and his four Italian assistants up to the Monte Rosa glacier. From here, the Swiss-Italian rescue party made off for the Dufour Spitze. The nine men met at an altitude of about 13,000 feet.

Thanks to the excellently organized joint operation of the Italian and Swiss guides and the skill of the glacier pilot no lives were lost.

[S.N.T.O.]

MEIRINGEN — 25 YEARS OF MOUNTAINEERING COURSES

The Institute of Mountaineering (Director, Arnold Glatthard) has announced two weeks of special tours. The first, from 27th June to 4th July, is for the "lightweights" whose chief interest is hiking and the observation of mountain flora and fauna. Small groups, directed by expert leaders, will be taken on mountain tours starting from Meiringen, and all that will be required of them is that they own stout hiking shoes and be in sufficiently good health not to mind feeling stiff and muscle-bound for the first few days.

The second jubilee week, 8th to 14th August, is intended for expert climbers only. They will be conducted via the most difficult route from Meiringen over into the Valais; by way of Mönchstollen to the Jungfrauoch, then over the Fiescherhorn to the Rhone Valley, and finally up the Matterhorn by way of the Zmuttgrat, a climb which places the greatest demands on mountaineers.

Among the more experienced climbers who have attended advanced courses at the Institute is Sir John Hunt, leader of the successful British Himalaya Expedition of 1953. Perhaps the best known contemporary name of all among the many graduates of the Institute of Mountaineering is the U.S. Secretary of Defence, Robert McNamara, who has been to Meiringen twice with his two sons.

The Institute caters for the most diverse needs. Each year it offers no less than five distinct courses: a basic