

Switzerland: the birthplace of alpine ski-ing

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK**

Band (Jahr): - **(1965)**

Heft 1489

PDF erstellt am: **20.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-696116>

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1965 The Year
of the Alps

SWITZERLAND: THE BIRTHPLACE OF ALPINE SKI-ING

By SIR ARNOLD LUNN

Of the five Alpine countries, Switzerland, France, Italy, Austria and Germany, none has played a more important role in the development of Alpine ski-ing than Switzerland.

The first real ski-tours in the Alps were carried out in the winter of 1893. On 28th January 1893, Christopher, later Colonel, Iselin and three friends crossed the Prugel pass (1,554 metres) from Glarus to the Muotatal on ski, and on 8th February in the same year Iselin and Jenny climbed on ski the Schild (2,302 metres), the first real Alpine summit to be ascended on ski. In March 1893, Stäubli and Carl Egger climbed the Chasseral on ski above Bienne and the brothers Branger of Davos crossed the Maienfelder Furka from Davos to Arosa. In that same historic year, 1893, the first Swiss ski club, the Ski Club of Glarus, was founded.

On 23rd March 1894, the brothers Branger of Davos guided Sir Arthur Conan Doyle to the top of the Maienfelder Furka. Conan Doyle wrote a very amusing account of this expedition in the "Strand Magazine", this being the first English article on a ski tour in the Alps.

It was again in Switzerland that ski-mountaineering, that is, ski-ing expeditions in the High Alps, first began. The first historic ski expedition in the High Alps was in January 1897 when a party of German mountaineers, W. Paulcke, V. de Beauclair, R. Mönrichs, Dr. Ehlert, and W. Lohmüller, crossed from Meiringen to Brig in the Rhone Valley by the Grimsel, Oberaarjoch, Grünhornlücke and Concordia.

Among the great pioneers of ski-mountaineering, we may mention the Genevese, Professor F. F. Roget, who made the first complete traverse of the Oberland glaciers from Kandersteg to Meiringen with the present writer in January 1909, and the high level route from Bourg St. Pierre with Marcel Kunz, another famous Swiss climber in January 1911.

In the development of ski technique, Adelboden in

the Bernese Oberland is of great importance, for it was at Adelboden that Vivian Caulfield inaugurated his campaign against the use of the single stick for braking or for helping out a turn. At that time the dominant school was the Lilienfeld school founded by the great Austrian, Zdarsky. It is to the credit of Zdarsky that he fully realised the supreme importance of accurate control in steep Alpine country, and his system of step turning helped out by the generous use of a large single pole, produced in a remarkably short time skiers who were competent to undertake long expeditions, and who could ski steadily with few falls. In the winter of 1902-3, W. R. Rickmers, a distinguished German, converted the British skiers in Adelboden to the Lilienfeld school, but within a few years the Lilienfeld school had disappeared from the Alps and the use of the single stick to help out a turn or to reduce speed was taboo.

This revolution was begun at Adelboden in Switzerland, and was the work of an Englishman, Vivian Caulfield, who was under the impression that he was advocating the Norwegian as against the Austrian style. His book, "How to Ski", published in 1910, created a sensation, and before long the use of the single stick for braking or helping out a turn was considered to be hopelessly old-fashioned. Actually, the Scandinavians were far less extreme than Caulfield in their condemnation of the use of the single stick. One of the objections to the Downhill Racing Rules which I proposed for the adoption of the International Ski Congress of 1930, was that racers were disqualified if they braked with a single stick. This restriction was regarded as artificial by the Scandinavians.

Be that as it may, the modern style of ski-ing, which has adopted this veto on the single stick, emanated in Switzerland.

It was perhaps inevitable that the classic Scandinavian competitions, langlauf and ski-jumping, should alone have been recognised internationally in the early days of ski-ing in the Alps. All the early Swiss Championships were decided on the long, cross-country race and the jumping competition. Mürren in the Bernese Oberland is the birthplace of Alpine racing, for it was at Mürren that the modern Slalom was invented by the British, and the Rules for Downhill Racing were worked out by the Kandahar Ski Club which takes its name from the oldest of Downhill Races, the Lord Roberts of Kandahar Challenge Cup. The first allies of the British were the Swiss University students, and the oldest of all international Alpine races, the Anglo-Swiss University Race, was first jointly organised by Dr. Walter Amstutz and myself.

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The first Rules for Downhill and Slalom Racing were adopted by the Fédération Internationale de Ski in 1930. These were the Rules which had been jointly worked out by the British and by the Swiss.

It is clear that in two great branches of ski-ing, ski-mountaineering and ski-racing, the contribution of Switzerland has been more important than that of any other country.

[S.N.T.O.]

SHOES ON EXHIBITION

In the town of Schönenwerd, in the house called "Zum Felsgarten" which was once the residence of the Bally family, there is one of Switzerland's most charming museums. Its collected treasures from all parts of the world graphically portray for the visitor the history of "man's oldest means of transportation" — the shoe. The exhibits show the development of footgear virtually from the earliest bits of hide and bark to the most modern, elegant sandals. There is a collection of porcelains, all in the shape of shoes, which were designed as vases, canisters, inkwells, etc.; and valuable works of art, woodcuts and engravings, some of them originals, which show the development of the shoemaking trade, from the simplest cobbler to the modern factory. Unique early documents on economic matters, as well as art history and the development of shoemaking technology, provide the viewer with a survey of the symbolic significance of the shoe from ancient days to the present. The cellar of the "Felsgarten" is fixed up as a cobbler's workshop, to show the modest beginnings of what has grown into the great Bally enterprise.

[S.N.T.O.]

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