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Long winter set new records with fewer deaths

It is official: The 2008/09 winter season was longer and snowier than average, according to Swiss researchers.

In a wrap-up report detailing last winter's statistics, the Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research in Davos said Switzerland's wet winter broke numerous records.



Starting in early October, snow fell across most of the country, leaving even lowland communities like Zurich with as much as 20cm on the ground. In central Switzerland and the canton of Valais the snowpack grew to one metre thick in places, a record for that time of year.

Storms carried through well into April, when areas like the Saastal received up to two metres of new snow in four days.

Areas along the crest of the Alps and toward the south had the greatest snow cover and reported two- to three-times as much snow as normal. Juf, in canton Graubünden, set a new snow-depth record for 108 days.

Other communities in canton Graubünden and Ticino also set records. St Moritz reported 156cm on the ground in February. Nante, in southern Switzerland, reported 210cm that month.

Avalanche danger remained considerable for much of the winter, though deaths were down. *from swissinfo*

Shortwave Radio replaced by Internet Radio

A layman's understanding...

Some 53 years ago I made my homesickness bearable by listening to the Swiss Shortwave service in German, French or English. Remember the mantel-radios in most homes in the 'fifties? Most of them were capable of receiving the shortwave emissions from BBC London and broadcasts of many other countries.

Most countries had shortwave services reaching around the globe on different wave bands. Swiss Radio International, as it was called then, had started in the 'thirties and transmitted programs in many different languages. This service from Switzerland, paid for mainly by the Swiss population via the Radiogebühren, was terminated some years ago. I mourned the loss, since I used to listen to their Swiss news, Swiss folk music and documentaries.

The computer with a connection to an *internet service provider* is now replacing the shortwave radio, thanks to many radio stations broadcasting free over the internet. So, now the reception of Swiss music as well as any other program is possible, provided you have a computer or

lap-top with a *broadband* connection; the old *dial-up-connection* is not suitable. It is too slow and suitable only for the written word.

Just like a monthly telephone rental charge there is a broadband charge (payable to your provider) according to the length of time you wish to use the service and according to the quantity of what is called the download. Downloading (or listening to...) music for example takes less downloading quantity than watching pictures or films. Yes, you can even watch 'Schweizer Fernsehen', but music is sufficient for me at this time. The two Swiss internet radio stations I listen to are Radio Eviva, www.eviva.ch and Buureradio, www.buureradio.ch

Once you are connected to one of these internet destinations you will be able to click on the appropriate words and reception is in CD quality. Any computer shop can provide you with more information. In many parts of New Zealand you could possibly find the *Senior Net* organisation, where more experienced people help newcomers to learn about the internet in slow and easy steps.

Rinaldo Rust

Mother tongue of new minister divides Swiss

Switzerland's German, French and Italian-speaking communities are at odds over whether a native French speaker should succeed outgoing interior minister Pascal Couchepin.

The results of a survey found a majority of German speakers saying language is not an issue when choosing a successor to French-speaking Couchepin, while Swiss French and Swiss Italians beg to differ.

Nearly 60 per cent of German speakers - who make up about two-thirds of the population -

said it would not matter if the new cabinet minister was one of their own kind.

However, nearly 70 per cent of those asked in French-speaking Switzerland, and 55 per cent of Swiss-Italians said they did not want to see another German speaker voted into the cabinet.

And 42 per cent of everyone surveyed said they would prefer parliament to elect a woman, regardless of her mother tongue. Twenty-two per cent want a man while 32 per cent said gender was unimportant. *from swissinfo*