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The Mt Ruapehu Christiania Derby and its Swiss Touch

The Christiania Derby is a Ski Race taking place on Mt Ruapehu each year. Organised by the Christiania Ski Club, the event has been running for an amazing 57 years!

The Derby started in 1957 and was created by Hans Fitzl of the Auckland Swiss Club, whose life story has previously featured in the Helvetia. Hans Fitzl at the time lived in Hamilton with his wife Lea and baby daughter Carmen. He was a passionate skier but lamented the lack of good skiing opportunities and accommodation at the Mountain. For this well-known entrepreneur, this was no major obstacle. With two friends from Hamilton, he founded the Christiania Ski Club in 1954/55. He was its Club Captain for six to seven years and is still an Honorary Member. The club soon decided to build the beautiful club house that stands to this day in the Te Heu Heu Valley by Whakapapa on Mt Ruapehu. Hans, being an architect, took a central interest in this. He organised many working parties to progress the construction of the club house and towards the end, was building it himself.

In 1957, he had the glorious idea of organising a ski race between the Christiania Ski Club and other ski clubs on the Mountain: the Christiania Derby. What set this apart from other races was that this was a team race where skiers raced in small teams of three. The racing time was averaged out over the three skiers, making it possible for the

weaker skiers to have a winning chance. And guess which team won the first race in 1957. It probably goes without saying, but indeed it was Hans Fitzl's and well-deservedly so.

It was not the first time Hans won an important race on the mountain. In 1954, he and his friend Neil Meltzer from Hamilton went skiing on Mount Ruapehu. There, they chanced upon both the New Zealand and Australian national skiing teams training together for the forthcoming trans-Tasman competitions. Although not allowed to take part in the competition itself, Hans was invited to race the course which had been set out. To much consternation, he made the best time out of all the skiers in both teams! The New Zealand team coach asked him immediately whether he wanted to join the New Zealand team. Upon being informed that Hans did not have a New Zealand passport yet, the coach said 'no problems I'll sort that for you in a couple of days'. Alas, Hans had a wife and baby daughter to look after and only a few pennies to his name, so it had to be a 'no'.

The Christiania Derby continues to thrive and attracts some 150-200 skiers each year. This year, the Christiania Ski Club plans to honour Hans Fitzl for his past contributions. He has been invited as a guest of honour to join in this year's derby at Mt Ruapehu, and no doubt join the well-attended prize-giving function at the Christiania Ski Club house after

the event. What a wonderful opportunity for Hans to venture back to his favourite playground and be once more part of this big event. We wish him a very enjoyable and memorable trip, and look forward to his reports when he gets back.

Susie Wood



The Swiss Embassy presents

Jürg Bono

Deputy Head of Mission
and Head of Consular Affairs

The Embassy is pleased to announce that in April 2015 Jürg Bono joined the team as Deputy Head of Mission and Head of Consular Affairs. He took over the position previously held by Flavio Milan who was seconded to New Zealand's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, United Nations, Commonwealth & Human Rights Division.

Before being posted to New Zealand Jürg Bono was Head of Consular Affairs in Washington D.C.. This is already his second assignment to New Zealand as back in 1986 he got to know Wellington as Consular trainee at the Swiss Embassy. Wellington will also be home to his wife Nga and their son Lucas.

The Embassy and its Consular Section strive to deliver the same services to you as every communal administration back home. If you need any assistance that the Embassy is able to offer please don't hesitate to contact us.

Jürg Bono recently had the opportunity to meet some of you at the AGM of the Swiss Society in Wellington. He looks forward to meeting you at the Embassy or another function of a Swiss Club.



Hans Fitzl in action