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Alphorn Festival in Nendaz

Each year for the last 17 years Nendaz has held an Alphorn Festival in their very beautiful region of the Canton of Valais. Nendaz is on a plateau at an altitude of about 1400m and in winter forms part of the 4 Vallees ski resort and is one of the most extensive ski areas in Europe, with a ski area of over 400km.

Our daughter Bernadette who is based in Aarau did some research to see if there was going to be an Alphorn Festival on whilst we were going to be in Switzerland so found this event and booked accommodation for three nights with the event starting on 20th July. There was a huge marquee set up in the village greens where they offered entertainment Friday evening and all day Saturday. There were bands, yodel groups, alphorn groups, bell players, costume dancers and accordion players performing on both days in the marquee.

On Saturday the formal part of the alphorn contest started and unfortunately due to bad weather forecast the event was shifted from the alps to the local hall where the contestants performed in different categories in their allocated times. After the bell rang there was complete silence and then the contestants started whilst the judges were closed off and were only able to listen to the alphorns. There were some stunning performances and amazing acoustics in this hall.

Later in the day they held their traditional parade with alphorn players, local groups and the farming community. For some this seemed to be the highlight

of the event. Following this they offered more entertainment in the marquee and of course lots of local foods and drinks to purchase. We of course enjoyed some Raclette and local white wine! I have to mention the delicious apricot tart as this was just the height of the apricot season and the Walliser apricots seem to be the best.

The following day the blue skies returned and everyone took the gondola up to Tracouet for the Finale of the competitions and festivities. When we stepped out of the gondola we were greeted by continuous alphorn and music recitals performed on a stage near a small lake. It was a great atmosphere and perfect mountain setting to end the festival and after all the winners of the different categories were announced there was a group performance of about 150 alphorn players.

Most of the participants were local French-speaking people, some from France and nearby cantons of Fribourg and Neuchatel but throughout the event they had a very entertaining group "Trio St-Jakob" from Nidwald who managed to get people to fill the dance-floor and sing along to their music.

What a great weekend and great event in a totally different setting to what we are used to. I'm sure we will be back to visit this area again – would love to see all the beautiful chalets in winter.

Written by Anita Zuber whilst on a three month holiday in Switzerland – photos by Walter Zuber.

