

Holiday of a lifetime thrills 200 Children

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HOLIDAY OF A LIFETIME

By DEREK



One of the holiday highlights was this giant balloon which carried veteran Swiss pilot Fred Dolder on his 190th balloon trip.



Disembarking at the island of Lützelau for the Official Day ceremonies are British Consul-General Stephen Lockhart and St. Gall president Eggenberger.

It was no wonder regular readers of "Die Linth" rubbed their eyes with astonishment when a rather unusual edition of the thrice-weekly Rapperswil newspaper appeared on the streets of this old-world Swiss lakeside town the other day.

For, splashed right across the front page, in letters one-and-a-quarter inches high, was a banner headline screaming one word — SWINGING!

"Die Linth" had, in fact, burst out into English — a unique event in Swiss journalism — as a tribute to 200 British schoolchildren who were just finishing a fantastic ten-day holiday in Switzerland.

And fantastic is certainly the right word, for there has never been a Swiss holiday like it. No effort and no expense had been spared to ensure that their stay would be something they would remember for the rest of their lives.

The children had been nominated by the winners of a nation-wide contest organised by the food-manufacturing firm of Crosse and Blackwell, now a subsidiary of Maggi. They came from all parts of the country, and their ages ranged from 11 to 14.

But long before the contest was held, detailed preparations were under way for what the organisers insisted should really be, in every possible way, the holiday of a lifetime.

As the leading authority on holidays in Switzerland, the Swiss National Tourist Office was brought in right at the start. It was decided that the children should be based in North-eastern Switzerland, and that they should be accommodated in two resorts — Rapperswil and Wildhaus.

Once this had been settled, the full programme for the holiday began to take shape. And by the time the children had been selected the whole tour had been planned with all the precision of a military operation.

They flew to Switzerland in two BEA Vanguards, one from London and the other from Manchester. This in itself was a thrilling experience, for most of them had never flown before.

And what a film-star welcome awaited them at Zurich airport! Crowds of beaming, hand-shaking VIPs, as well as hordes of reporters and photographers and a Swiss Television film unit.

Next a quick sightseeing tour of Zurich, and then on to Rapperswil where, in the 700-year-old castle that dominates the southern half of the lake of Zurich, came another remarkable reception.

Here the children met a man whose herculean efforts in the next ten days were to be a vital factor in the overwhelming success of their holiday.

Hans Rathgeb, 38-year-old president of the Rapperswil Tourist Office, author, editor of the local newspaper and district president of the Liberal Party, was waiting to give them their first real taste of Swiss hospitality.

As trumpeters on the battlements played a triumphal fanfare, the children walked through the main gate of the castle to be presented with richly-decorated cowbells and invited to an open-air tea-party prepared for them in the courtyard.

THRILLS 200 CHILDREN

MEAKIN

Ten days later, just before the children were to start off on their homeward journey, there was a simple but moving ceremony in Rapperswil's main square.

Hans Rathgeb had been asked to bring along his own three children to see the party off. But the presentations that followed came as a complete surprise.

With the British children forming a vast semi-circle, a football was handed over to 14-year-old Hans Peter, and there were ice-skates for 11-year-old Susan and 9-year-old Beatrice.

Said Hans, senior, when the cheers and the prolonged ringing of cowbells had subsided: "Thank you for being so nice. The people of Rapperswil love you all".

Everywhere they went during their holiday, the children found the red-carpet treatment awaiting them. Flags flew in their honour, and local officials could not do enough to make them happy.

When they went to Altdorf, they found a modern William Tell — and his son — waiting to greet them. They were even treated to a re-enactment of the famous apple-shooting incident, and each child was given a pastry *Uristier*, with ribbons of black and yellow, the cantonal colours.

And on their visit to Liechtenstein, they were given a right royal welcome, first by Count Geza Andrassy, who took them round the Vaduz art gallery and stamp museum, and later by His Serene Highness Prince Emanuel, cousin of the ruler of this pocket state, who showed them round the castle — an honour that is only accorded to distinguished guests.

They travelled about in style, in trains and postal coaches, lake steamers and chairlifts.

They visited the Pestalozzi Children's Village, where they made presentations of English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish costumes. They toured the Abbey library of St. Gall, and looked around Klosterhof Cathedral. At Lucerne they had a fascinating time at the Institute of Transport, for they were allowed to play with life-size working models to their hearts' delight.

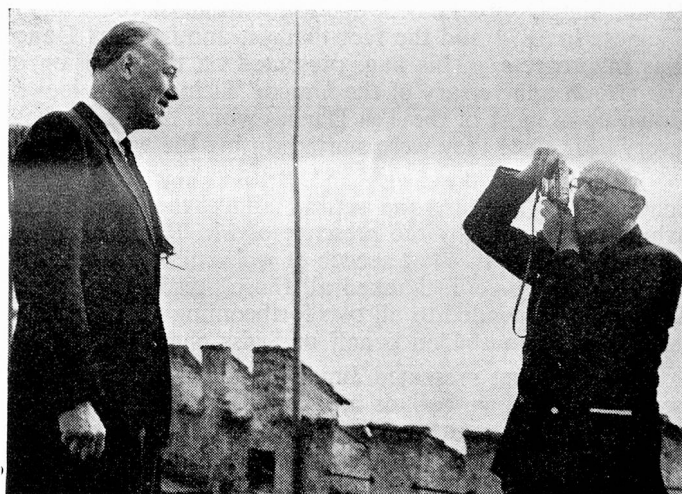
Some of the senior children had a privileged look at Swiss democracy in action when they went to Appenzell for the traditional *Landsgemeinde*, where they had a unique close-up of an event the tourist rarely sees.

All these activities were made possible thanks to the efforts of the tourist chiefs of the different parts of Switzerland, in particular Mr. Armin Moser and Mr. Werner Boos of the North-eastern Switzerland Tourist Association.

And co-ordinating it all was a man without whose tireless energy this holiday of a lifetime would not have been possible — Mr. Albert Kunz, the general manager in London of the Swiss National Tourist Office.

No one doubted that it was because Mr. Kunz has friends in high places that, with the exception of one rain-swept day, the holiday was blessed with glorious sunshine!

And everyone soon realised that even the rainy day had, in fact, been specially laid on in advance. For that was the day the party was due to visit the Rhine Falls, and it was obvious to all that the Kunz-organised rainstorm had been ordered with the intention of swelling the turbulent river Rhine so that Europe's mightiest waterfall would be at its most spectacular best!



Mr. Victor Crosse, grandson of a founder of Crosse and Blackwell, photographs Prince Emanuel during the visit to tiny Liechtenstein.



Elaine Taylor, 13-year-old Salford schoolgirl, inspects a 72-year-old farmer's sword when she went to see the Appenzell Landsgemeinde.



Party manager Charles Marsh (left) says goodbye to Hans Rathgeb and his family on behalf of the 200 British boys and girls.

The photographs on these pages are by Derek Meakin and Erich Bachmann.