

The swiss Alps - crown of Europe

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THE SWISS ALPS — CROWN OF EUROPE

Until about a century ago, the high mountains of Switzerland were regarded with dread and awe by the peasants living in the valleys below. As in the Himalayas even today, fearsome legends were woven around the peaks — tales of death and disaster at the hands of the evil spirits that haunted them.

Superstition aside, high mountains always are dangerous. Lovely, serene, alluring in fine weather, the peaks are prone to turn angry and treacherous when provoked by a sudden storm, enshrouding themselves in impenetrable mist and hurling down rocks and stones on the heads of hapless climbers.

No wonder, therefore, that those who lived at their feet and witnessed their rages gave them a wide berth. In the Swiss Alps there is in fact, only one record of a first ascent of a major peak before the middle of the last century: the conquest — in summer — of the Jungfrau by the Meyer brothers of Aarau in 1811. The first winter ascent of the peak — which today can be “climbed” by railway as far as the Jungfraujoch, 11,333 feet — was accomplished only in 1874 by American-born W. A. B. Coolidge (1850-1926), together with his aunt Miss Brevoort and five mountain guides from Grindelwald.

Coolidge, who loved the Bernese Oberland and — significantly — is buried in Grindelwald, lived most of his life in England. It was, in fact, the British who first “discovered” the Alps and, with their proverbial bulldog determination, set out to conquer them. 14th July 1865, marks the centenary of the sensational but tragic first ascent of the Matterhorn, at the seventh attempt, by Edward Whymper, and his party of seven; only Whymper himself and two of the three guides survived when their rope broke during the descent.

It was also in the year 1865 that the first party of winter sports guests arrived at the now world-famous

Alpine resort of St. Moritz. A local hotelier — so the story goes — had promised them free board and lodging for every day of bad weather. Though it is not recorded whether there were any Scots among them, they spent three months “on the house”! These and numerous other events recorded just a century ago in the annuals of pioneer mountaineering in Switzerland have made 1965 the natural choice as “The Year of the Swiss Alps”.

Mountain climbing is a virile, challenging sport which is gaining in popularity year by year — on the distaff side as well. In Switzerland, of course, there are virtually no more virgin peaks left to climb — even the fearsome Eiger North Wall has been “done”. But there are plenty of formidable summits presenting thrills and a challenge; and for the less active or less enterprising mountaineers there are paths, tracks and easy walks to quite respectable altitudes which do not unduly tax the stamina of the elderly.

Crumpled Switzerland is a land of sweeping panoramas. The central region around and beyond Lucerne rising to the great St. Gotthard divide, the eastern section backed by the Lake of Constance, then the Jura, the Bernese Oberland and the Valais towards the west — all afford glorious climbing — as well as breath-taking views from lofty vantage points which can be reached without exertion by the young and old via aerial cableways, funiculars and chair-lifts.

At Rosenlauri, near Meiringen in the Bernese Oberland, is what is probably the most famous climbing school in the world — the Swiss Mountaineering Institute. It is run by veteran alpinist Arnold Glatthard. Many Americans, too, have followed his courses. In fact, a certain American statesman, by the name of McNamara has expressed interest in taking part this coming summer.

[S.N.T.O.]

A VOTING WEEK-END IN SWITZERLAND

The first week-end in December was fixed for the federal plebiscite on the continuation of limited price control measures. With a participation of 37%, the proposed law was accepted by the electorate and all the Cantons. 480,407 were for and 118,772 against. The largest turnout of voters was in the Canton of Schaffhausen (71.1%), closely followed by the Valais (70) and the Aargau (69.9%). The Ticino showed the poorest participation with 17%.

The biggest majority resulted in Fribourg (9,161: 1,243), and other Cantons with a large majority were Zurich (105,341: 19,619), Berne (71,786: 14,085), Lucerne (16,401: 2,845), Obwalden (1,124: 231), Nidwalden (1,835: 496), Glarus (3,186: 540), Zug (3,080: 607), Baselstadt (19,515: 3,722), Schaffhausen (10,810: 2,081), Appenzell-Innerrhoden (874: 168), and Grisons (11,556: 2,549). Geneva showed the smallest majority with (9,863: 9,103), followed by Schwyz (4,976: 3,397), Neuchâtel (7,126: 3,707) and Solothurn (14,472: 5,458).

Other results were Uri (3,164: 742), Appenzell-Ausserrhoden (5,147: 1,754), Baselland (9,199: 2,342), St. Gall (29,981: 7,995), Aargau (48,475: 16,343), Thurgau (16,868: 5,466), Ticino (7,372: 2,017), Vaud (24,334: 5,464) and Valais (24,761: 6,798).

Many Cantons and Communes used the same week-

end to submit various proposals to the popular vote.

In the Canton of Zurich, both proposals — change of legal constitutional and administrative laws and a state contribution of 11.2 million francs towards the home for epileptics — were accepted by a large majority.

With a participation of 33%, the voters of the Canton of Berne accepted the two proposals, the law regulating public holidays and the partial revision of the water laws.

With a large majority, the citizens of Uri approved the law concerning state help in the case of damage caused by the elements, and the proposal to drop an article in the cantonal legal administration law.

36% of the Schwyz electorate rejected the new law governing inn keeping and the sale of wines and spirits dating from 1899. Thus, the proposed examination which publicans have to pass in each Canton except the two Appenzells, has still not become compulsory in the Canton of Schwyz.

A similar law which had been recommended by all Parties in the Canton of Solothurn, was, surprisingly, only accepted with 11,068 to 9,994 votes.

Baselstadt passed the new citizen rights law by rejecting an alteration of and addition to the old law. With a