6.2. The Great Outdoors - 150 years of mountain sports and tourism in the Alps. Part I

Panel organiser: Barton, Susan, International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK

The year 2013 will be the 150th anniversary of popular tourism by the British in Switzerland. In 1863 the English tourism entrepreneur Thomas Cook organised his first tour of Switzerland, vividly documented by Jemima Morrell in her journal published a century later. Tourists visited remote locations in the rural Alp regions where physical exertion in order to be rewarded by the joy of experiencing spectacular and voracious mountain scenery. Less than two years later the first winter guests began to arrive, in St Moritz and Davos. Although already popular with grand tourists, the 1860s marked the beginning of tourism in the Alps. In celebration of this century and a half, this panel will examine the role played by tourism and outdoor activities, such as the search for health in spas and sanatoria, mountaineering, hiking and winter sports in the rural alpine environment.

Mountain landscapes provide locations for leisure, sport and tourism. The rural environment is itself a commodity to be consumed and enjoyed by visitors who contribute to local economies. Tourism provided new opportunities for employment in the hospitality, construction, travel and leisure industries as well as cultural exchange, and technological transfer. Tourism has both changed and helped conserve the landscape. As early as the 1890s, concerns were being raised about the impact of railway building on the landscape and the increase of visitor numbers would bring. Mountain railways, ski lifts and other tourism infrastructure, the erosion of footpaths, the collection of minerals and flora and disturbance of habitats by increasing numbers of visitors all had an impact on visual amenity and sensitive ecosystems, not to mention the effect on traditional cultures. Papers in this panel will discuss the history of leisure, sport and tourism in the mountains, with a particular focus on Switzerland.

Chair: Roche, Clara, Birkbeck, University of London, UK

Tuesday, 20 August 2013 // 1515 – 1645 // Session 6 – Room A-119

6.2.1. Löwenplatz in Lucerne – a factory for tourist photographs

Bürgi, Andreas, Department of History, University of Lucerne, Switzerland

Industrial quarters came into existence in many Swiss cities in the 19th century. Their equivalent in Lucerne is the Tourismusmeile, literally the ‘Tourism Mile’ with its Lion Monument (1821), Glacier Gardens (1873), Bourbaki Panorama (1899), Alpinum Museum (1901), previously Mayer’s Diorama from 1856 onwards, and Stauffer’s Museum of stuffed Swiss animals (1859-1888); in 1902 the Internationales Kriegs- und Friedensmuseum (International Museum of War and Peace) opened. This district provides Lucerne with a unique urban feature. No other towns or cities in Switzerland or in the Alpine region have a specific district like this, with such densely packed selection of specially created tourist attractions. Construction and expansion of the Tourism Mile was only possible with modern financing models, the latest technology, established tourism infrastructures and media processes and content that appealed to the tastes of a broad public. The paper represents the institutions of the Lucerne Tourismusmeile and shows the broad techniques and strategies of exhibiting (and thus selling) Switzerland. Geology and glacial formations and structures of Switzerland, Ice Age, prehistory and the then newly discovered romanticism of lake dwellings, alpine fauna and flora, breathtaking scenery. In the Alps in documentary and panoramic, engineering and railway construction under most difficult conditions (St Gotthard Tunnel), Swiss virtues, such as bravery, reliability and loyalty, humanitarianism and the engagement for the soldiers on the battlefields (Switzerland as depository for the Geneva Convention).

6.2.2. The symbiotic relationship between tourism and winter sports

Barton, Susan, International Centre for Sports History and Culture, De Montfort University, Leicester, UK

Tourists in Switzerland, influenced by the culture of English public schools played a major role in the formation of Swiss alpine resorts from the 1860s onwards. By creating Outdoor Amusement Committees based in major hotels and resort-wide clubs for toboganning, ice-skating, curling and later bobsleighing and skiing, these tourists played a key role in the transition of alpine communities from mountain- and health-oriented and historical cultural centres into winter sports resorts, open all year round. Technology transfer and infrastructural development, particularly in transport and the hospitality industries facilitated the growth of these resorts and also of sporting competitions within and between them. In the early 20th century, competition organised by the Olympic movement beginning with ice-skating at the 1908 London Games followed by the introduction of ice-hockey in Antwerp in 1920 and then a separate Winter Olympics from 1924 created a two-fold legacy: an increased awareness of and participation in winter sports and a growth in tourism in mountain resorts as participation extended beyond privileged elites.

Bürgi, Andreas

Bürgi studied German, Philosophy and History of Art in Zurich and Berlin. He completed his doctorate with a thesis on German language travel narratives in the 18th century and subsequently won several SNRF research projects: co-editor of the complete works of Ulrich Rüeder; project leader and editor of the project “Franc Ludwig/Pfaffen ‘Palast der Ursprüche’ (Palace of Central Switzerland)”, head editing of and edition of Julie Bondeli’s letters. Main research interests: Switzerland in the 18th century, the history of visual perception, the history of surveying the history of travel and 18th century travel literature.


6.2.3. Alpine Communities as Entrepreneurs: The Cultural Capital of “Backwardness” and the Coercion of Urban Alpinists, 1890-1914

Anderson, Ben, Keele University, UK

Of the vast network of huts and paths in Eastern Alps, the vast majority were planned and built in the decades around 1900. This paper challenges assumptions that we should equate the funding, planning and narrative of these developments among urban Alpine communities with control over this radical Alpine-intervention. Instead, it suggests that local Alpine communities were able to mobilise narratives of cultural, economic and national ‘development’, in order to compel further investment in the Alpine terrain by urban Alpinists. Huts and paths were not, as sometimes assumed, an investment with a sound financial return. However, by the turn of the 19th century, they did fi for numerous important cultural roles. Huts and paths were portrayed as expanding Deutschtum into the Southern Alps and as promoting national identity through ‘joint work’ between Alpine communities and their ‘national’ counterparts. Constructions were portrayed as philanthropic urban interventions in the economic development of the ‘backward’ German-speaking Alps. Likewise, the network was described as a tool of liberal democratization, to the chagrin of elite Alpinists who voiced concerns about the destruction of Alpine ‘wasteland’, prefiguring a later rhetoric of Heimatschutz. As urban Alpinists became increasingly reluctant to invest in the Alpine terrain after 1900, Alpine communities drew upon these intercultural cultural tropes to demand further construction from already heavily-indebted urban Alpine associations. In doing so, the paper challenges assumptions of urban aggression and rural passivity in developing spaces beyond the city.

Anderson, Ben

Anderson studied German, Philosophy and History of Art in Zurich and Berlin. He completed his doctorate with a thesis on German language travel narratives in the 18th century and subsequently won several SNRF research projects: co-editor of the complete works of Ulrich Rüeder; project leader and editor of the project “Franc Ludwig/Pfaffen ‘Palast der Ursprüche’ (Palace of Central Switzerland)”, head editing of and edition of Julie Bondeli’s letters. Main research interests: Switzerland in the 18th century, the history of visual perception, the history of surveying the history of travel and 18th century travel literature.

Barton, Susan

Barton is a honorary research fellow in the International Centre for Sports History and Culture at De Montfort University in Leicester. She has a wide range of interests in social history and her publications include work on historical textile industries, working-class sport and leisure in Victorian England, sport and leisure in the 19th century, sport and leisure in the 20th century. Her current project is an investigation into the Winter Olympics up to 1948 and their sporting and tourism legacies. The books include Youthful Living in the Alps – the origins of youth tourism in Switzerland, 1865-1914.

Roche, Clara

Roche is a First Class History degree from Birkbeck in 2007 developed into a fast-tracked with the long nineteenth century and the particular interest in the history of women, medicine and science. A Masters at Cambridge University in History and Philosophy of Science & Medicine consolidated this and led to the discovery of female mountaineers who appeared to transgress the prescribed medical, scientific and social norm of middle-class women. I am currently a doctoral student at Birkbeck researching this group of women for over thirty years I have been, and continue to work as a physiotherapist.