



# SWISS GUIDES

## Shaping Mountain Culture in Western Canada

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# SWISS GUIDES

## Shaping Mountain Culture in Western Canada

By Ilona Spaar

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Cover photograph: Swiss guides Ed Feuz Jr. and Rudolph Aemmer on Victoria Glacier, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-1819.

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# Foreword

It is my pleasure to present to you this catalogue, which is dedicated to the remarkable history of Swiss mountain guides and ski instructors in the Canadian Rocky, Columbia and Coastal Mountains from the onset of the 20th century until the mid seventies. It shows the important role these pioneers played in the Canadian mountaineering history, by contributing greatly to the development of mountain guiding, mountain safety, skiing and helicopter-skiing in Western Canada. Among other things, they introduced safe mountaineering gear, which was developed in Switzerland and based on their diverse climbing experiences in the Alps. This was the first step that made it possible for Canada to become world famous for recreational skiing as a winter pastime. Perhaps most importantly however, they taught Canadians to acquire a special appreciation and understanding for their wonderful mountains.

This catalogue outlines the touring exhibition *Swiss Guides: Shaping Mountain Culture in Western Canada*, which was designed by the Consulate General of Switzerland in Vancouver in honor of these Swiss pioneers, who helped form an everlasting link between Switzerland and Canada.

I would like to thank all the partners who made it possible to create this magnificent catalogue as well as the touring exhibition, which will be showcased around Canada.

I hope this catalogue will help you appreciate and understand the essential role of the Swiss mountain guides in Western Canada and encourages you to visit our touring exhibition.

## **Walter Deplazes**

Consul General of Switzerland  
Vancouver

# A Note from the Presenting Sponsor

At Pacific Arbour we are grateful to the Swiss pioneers for sharing their passion for mountains and helping us develop our distinct Canadian mountain culture. This mountain culture is an essential component of our Western Canadian identity. Many of the seniors who live in Pacific Arbour retirement residences have grand stories of mountain adventures. We thank those early Swiss guides for the role they played in creating both these memories and our Western Canadian identity.

## **Peter Gaskill**

President, Pacific Arbour



# Preface by the Author

For many of us, Western Canada and mountains go hand in hand. We associate the mountains with activities such as skiing, hiking and climbing and sometimes we forget about the origins of these activities. This catalogue illustrates the history of Canadian mountain culture and several of the people who helped to shape it the way it is today. Canadian mountain culture is a result of diverse cultural influences, and the Swiss impact is a particularly strong one. Deriving from the rich mountaineering tradition of the Alps, Swiss mountain guides in western Canada significantly contributed to the mountain culture for which Canada is internationally famous today.

There is much known about the legendary Swiss mountain guides who came to Canada between 1899 and 1954 to work for *Canadian Pacific Railway* (CPR) hotels. However, not much is written about the generations of Swiss mountain guides and mountaineers who came to Canada after 1954. This catalogue is the first attempt to bring together both the history of the Swiss CPR guides and the history of the 3rd and 4th generations of Swiss mountaineers in Canada who were crucial in the development of a strong mountain safety system, helicopter skiing and recreational skiing.

There is also little mention of the role that the wives of the mountain guides played in supporting their husbands. One chapter in this catalogue is dedicated to these women who deserve recognition for their achievements.

This exhibition and catalogue would not have been possible without the help of many people. My sincere thanks go to Nolan Gendron, Jane-Ann Kay, Martin Nieffer, Dwight Koss, Chic Scott, Robert W. Sandford, Beat Nobs, Jean and Allen Vaughan, Syd and Baeda Feuz, Fred Feuz, Alice Pallard, Rudi Gertsch, Jeff Gertsch, Peter Schlunegger, Sepp Renner, Kobi Wyss, Ernst Salzgeber, Margaret Gmoser, Lloyd Kiwi Gallagher, Hans and Helen Schwarz, Hans-Peter Stettler, J.R. Colani Bezzola, Peter Schaerer, Peter and Chris Perren, Susan Engler Potts, Walter and Leonie von Rotz, Peter and Ursula Jungen, Urs Kallen, Nick Monod, Peter Monod, Phillip Monod, Leo Berchtold, Fred Bosinger, Heinz Vivian, Peter Alder, Karl Ernst, Colleen Palumbo, Irv Graham, The Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies Banff Archive Team, Bob Kennell, and Aftaab Gulam.

I would like to express my special thanks to the descendants of the CPR guides and the Swiss mountaineering community in the Columbia and Rocky Mountains. I couldn't have received a warmer welcome when I visited them for my research. They enriched my work with many touching stories from the past and present and brought the history of the Swiss mountain guides in Western Canada back to life.

I hope this catalogue ignites the passion of the Swiss Guides in you and inspires you to explore the stunning mountains of Canada.

**Ilona Spaar**

PhD (Cand.)

March 2010

## INTRODUCTION

# SWISS GUIDES

## Shaping Mountain Culture in Western Canada



Pin of a Swiss Certified Mountain Guide, n.d. Bruno Engler photograph, courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.

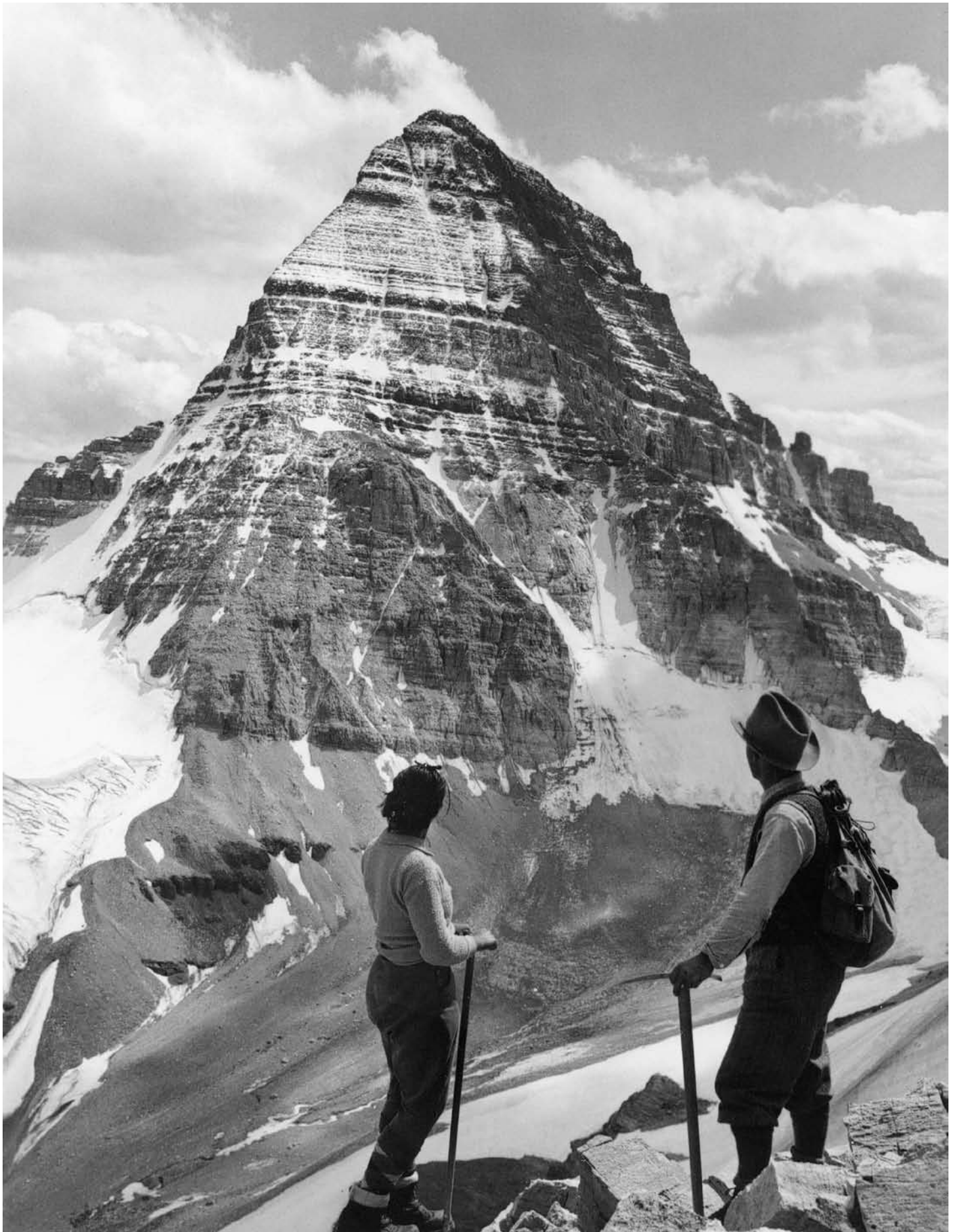
This exhibition illustrates the remarkable history of Swiss mountain guides and Swiss skiers in the Canadian Rocky, Columbia and Coastal Mountains and documents their pioneering methods in mountain guiding, mountain safety, skiing and helicopter-skiing. The Swiss guides and Swiss skiers contributed significantly to a mountain culture for which western Canada is renowned today.

The mountain guides that came from the Swiss Alps to work for *Canadian Pacific Railway* (CPR) hotels between 1899 and 1954 led hundreds of first ascents and taught safe climbing techniques to thousands of climbers. The legacy of these early Swiss pioneers continued to live on in the 1950s and 1960s when a younger generation of Swiss mountaineers became crucial for the development of modern mountain rescue, avalanche control, skiing and helicopter skiing.

Most importantly however, the Swiss guides helped cultivate a common appreciation of Canada's majestic western mountains and of an environment to be both preserved and revered.

Right: Swiss mountain guide Christian Haesler (r) and Joan Oliver (l) looking at stunning Mt. Assiniboine, also known as the Canadian Matterhorn, 1936. Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Archives NA-4868-242.

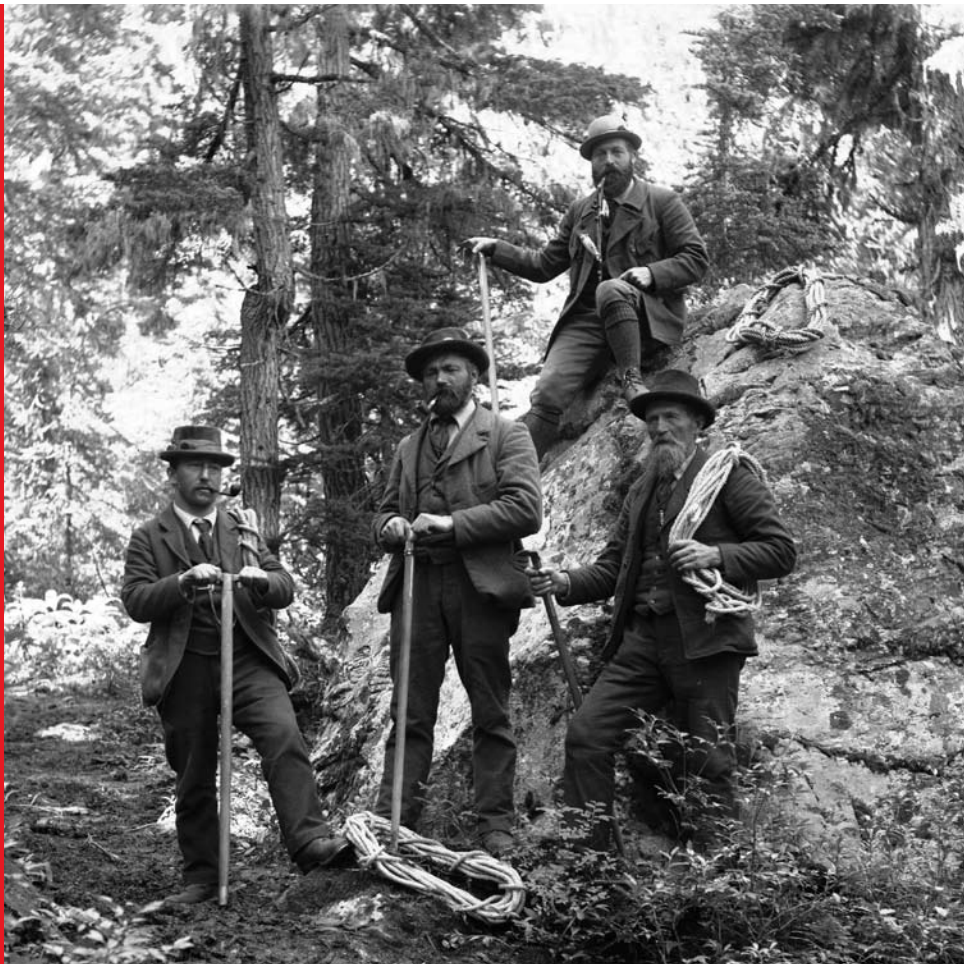






# THE FIRST SWISS MOUNTAIN GUIDES IN CANADA

“They are  
sturdy,  
picturesque  
fellows”<sup>1</sup>



Early Swiss guides at Glacier House, 1900. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V653-NG-676.

## MOUNTAINEERING TOURISM: FROM THE SWISS ALPS TO THE “CANADIAN ALPS”

The history of Swiss mountain guides and mountaineering tourism in western Canada go hand in hand. At the end of the 19th century, *Canadian Pacific Railway* (CPR) responded to a growing international interest in mountaineering by fostering tourism in the Rocky and Selkirk Mountains.

Climbing as a recreational activity in the summertime became highly popular in Europe in the 1860's. English alpinists, together with their Swiss mountain guides, soon conquered the major peaks in the Swiss Alps and Mont Blanc area. By the late 1880s, CPR provided easy access and luxurious accommodation in western Canada and soon, English and American mountaineers

were attracted to the untouched mountain landscape that also held the lure of first ascents.<sup>2</sup>

Recognizing the outstanding beauty and wilderness as well as the potential for mountaineering tourism, the federal government created Canada's first national park at Banff AB in 1885, and one year later, BC's Yoho National Park along the western slopes of the Continental Divide. As the CPR's general manager William C. Van Horne announced:

*“Since we can't export the scenery, we shall import the tourists”.*<sup>3</sup>



Swiss woman in traditional costume among early Swiss guides who came to Canada: (L-R) Christian Kaufmann, Jakob Mueller, Chris Haesler Sr., Fred Michel, Ed Feuz Sr., Christian Bohren, Hans Kaufmann, unidentified man, 1904. Photograph taken in Switzerland, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-186.



L-R: First professional Swiss guide in Canada, Peter Sarbach, with his clients George Baker and Norman Collie behind the Banff Springs Hotel, 1897. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V701-LC-9.



The CPR hotel Glacier House in Rogers Pass BC where most Swiss guides were stationed in their early years in Canada. Glacier House was the ultimate centre of North American alpinism during that time, ca. 1915. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V200-PA44-675.

## THE FIRST SWISS GUIDES IN CANADA

With the growing interest in mountain climbing the need for professional guides increased. After a deadly climbing accident in the Rockies in 1896, the first professional Swiss mountain guide in Canada, Peter Sarbach, was hired by the American Appalachian Mountain Club. Sarbach successfully led the party to the summit of Alberta's Mt. Lefroy on August 3, 1897. Only two days after, he led the first ascent of Mt. Victoria.

The CPR acknowledged the value of having professional Swiss guides in Canada's west and in 1899 Christian Haesler Sr. and Eduard Feuz Sr. from Interlaken, Switzerland, signed the company's first seasonal contracts.<sup>4</sup> The start of the 20th century brought more Swiss guides to Canada: Karl Schlunegger, Friedrich Michel, and Jacob Mueller arrived in the summer of 1900. A second generation of guides followed in 1901 with the brothers Ed, Ernst and Walter Feuz, Christian Haesler Jr., Rudolf Aemmer and Christian Bohren. Between 1899 and 1954, there were approximately 35 Swiss mountaineers employed by CPR to guide tourists during the summer in the mountain ranges of the Selkirk and Rockies.<sup>5</sup>

Inspired by Swiss architecture and completed in 1897, both the Mount Stephen House in Field BC and the Glacier House in Rogers Pass BC became popular "alpine" resorts. Due to its location near the Illecillewaet Glacier, Glacier House eventually turned into Canada's first tourist-exploration centre and played a crucial role for the early Swiss guides coming to Canada. As of 1926, the legendary CPR hotel Chateau Lake Louise not only became one of the main locations for mountaineering but also the main provider of services offered by Swiss mountain guides.<sup>6</sup>

1. *The Railway and Shipping World*, June 1899.
2. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 53; Hart, *The Selling of Canada*, 1983, 60.
3. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 6-7; Hart, *The Selling of Canada*, 1983, 7.
4. R.W. Sandford, *At the Top*, 1996, 6-7.
5. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 14-18.
6. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 7.



# THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

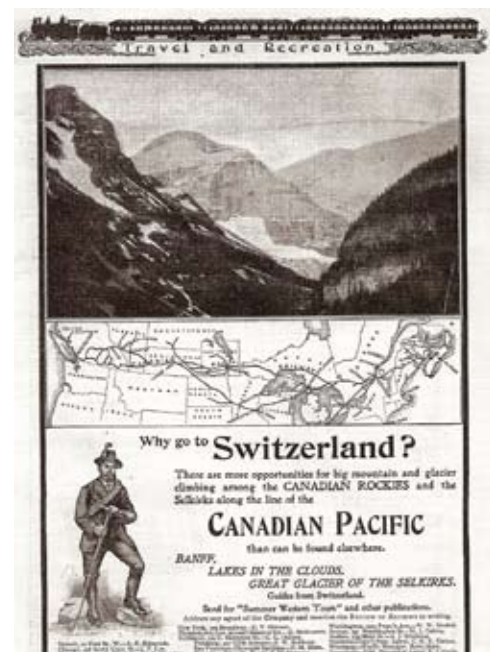
“50  
Switzerlands  
in One”<sup>1</sup>



A CPR ad highlights the greater dimension of the Canadian Rockies in comparison to the Swiss Alps, ca. 1900. Courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies.

## THE SWISS MOTIF AS MARKETING STRATEGY

The world's most famous alpinist at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Englishman Edward Whymper, proposed to the CPR that he promote the new Canadian West as a tourist destination in the English press. Whymper earned his reputation as a result of his groundbreaking first ascent of the Matterhorn in 1865. After a visit to the Canadian Rockies, he famously praised the area as “50 Switzerlands in one”, a slogan that the CPR quickly adopted to emphasize the Swiss motif for successful tourism business.<sup>2</sup> Another CPR slogan asked “Why go to Switzerland?”<sup>3</sup>



Why go to Switzerland, if there are more mountaineering opportunities in the Canadian Rockies? The Swiss guides as depicted in this CPR ad soon became icons of the Canadian Rockies associated with places like Lake Louise and the Great Glacier in Rogers Pass, n.d. Courtesy of Cameron Treleaven, Aquila Books, Calgary.

# THE SWISS GUIDES: A PUBLIC ATTRACTION

When the first Swiss guide in Canada, Peter Sarbach, arrived in Lake Louise AB in 1897, he was particularly interesting to the tourists. They were impressed by the handsome and elegant performance of the Swiss *Bergführer*.<sup>4</sup> The CPR realized that the unique looking, pipe smoking Swiss mountain guides with their distinctive ice axes and hemp ropes could be helpful in promoting the “Canadian Alps” as a new climbing destination.

During the first years in Canada, the seasonal Swiss guides spent more time doing promotional work than serious mountain guiding. The trips of the first seasonal Swiss guides who came to Canada between 1899 and 1903 to work for the CPR hotels were organized as promotional Alpine parades. On their way to Canada, it was expected of them to present themselves in full climbing gear in public places in London and Montreal. The Swiss guides also were reported to have performed a climb staged in a local stone quarry in Montreal. There is no doubt that the romantic image of elegantly dressed Swiss guides caused quite a stir in the cities as well as in the mountains.<sup>5</sup> Swiss guide Ed Feuz Jr. remembered:

*“In Switzerland we were just plain folks. In London and Canada we were curiosities.”*<sup>6</sup>



50 Switzerland in one: Guide for Banff's National Park, 1923.  
Courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies  
02.6-B22-1923.



L-R: Swiss guides Eduard Feuz Sr. and Christian Haesler Sr. pose in full regalia shortly after their arrival at Glacier House in 1899. Vaux family photograph, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V653-NG-584.

1. Cit. by Edward Whymper in *Report to the CPR*, Montreal, 1.4.1902 in B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 118.
2. E.J. Hart, *The Selling of Canada*, 1983, 67.
3. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 13.
4. German word for mountain guide.
5. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 15-19.
6. A.J. Kauffman and W.L. Putnam, *The Guiding Spirit*, 1986, 48.



# THE GOLDEN AGE OF THE SWISS GUIDES IN CANADA: 1899–1954



Christian Haesler, 1916. Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Archives NA-2696-10.



Mt. Assiniboine, the “Canadian Matterhorn” in 1912, Byron Harmon photograph, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V263-NA-553.



Christian Bohren led the first ascent of Mt. Assiniboine in 1901 together with Christian Haesler, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the von Rotz family.

## THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE SWISS GUIDES

Between 1899 and 1954, there were approximately 35 Swiss mountaineers employed by CPR. Known locally as the Golden Age of the Swiss Guides in Canada, an entire mountaineering culture grew up around the highly competent Swiss guides during these years. Of the 56 first ascents of mountains over 3000 metres prior to 1911, not less than 50 first ascents were performed under the guidance of Swiss mountaineers.<sup>1</sup> By 1925, CPR's 35 Swiss guides had led more than 250 first ascents in the Rocky and Selkirk Mountains.<sup>2</sup>

## FIRST ASCENTS AND EXPEDITIONS

One of the most spectacular first climbs was the first ascent of Mt. Assiniboine (3618m). Led by Chris Haesler Sr. and Christian Bohren, this mountain on the Alberta/British Columbia border is often referred to as the “Canadian Matterhorn”. Another incredible first ascent was by Christian Kaufmann, when he guided his client James Outram to Mt. Bryce BC (3507m) in 1902. In 1925, Hans Kohler and Heinrich Fuhrer led the first ascent of Mt. Alberta AB (3619m) with the Japanese Alpine Club—a climb that was so difficult it was not to be repeated for 23 years.





On the summit of Mt. Alberta after first ascent: Swiss guides Hans Kohler and Heinrich Fuhrer with members of the Japanese Alpine Club, July 21, 1925. Japanese Alpine Club photograph, courtesy of Robert W. Sandford.



L-R: Swiss guide Hans Fuhrer with A.J. Ostheimer and Jean Weber on their 63 day long expedition to the region of the Columbia and Clemenceau Icefields, 1927. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies M393-PG206.

An impressive expedition was undertaken in 1927 by guide Hans Fuhrer, his Swiss guiding assistant Jean Weber and their client A. J. Ostheimer, when, during their 63 day-long outing to the region of the Columbia and Clemenceau Icefields AB, they climbed 36 major peaks, 27 of them being first ascents.<sup>3</sup>

## SIMPLE CLIMBING EQUIPMENT

Compared to today's climbing standards, some of the accomplishments of the Swiss guides may seem "easy". However, it should be remembered that these guides undertook their explorations without today's very safe and functional equipment. During the more than 50 years, there was not a single mountaineering fatality of the thousands of climbs that Swiss guides led.<sup>4</sup>

1. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 140.
2. A.J. Kauffman and W.L. Putnam, *The Guiding Spirit*, 1986, 80.
3. R.W. Sandford *High Ideals*, 1999, 14, 23; C. Scott, *Pushing the Limits*, 2000, 104, 153.
4. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 25.



Swiss guides with mountains in the background that were named after them. Composite by Bruno Engler, courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.

# CANADIAN MOUNTAINS NAMED IN HONOR OF SWISS MOUNTAIN GUIDES AND CLIMBERS<sup>5</sup>

NAME OF MOUNTAIN	ELEVATION IN METRES	LOCATION	NAMED AFTER
Feuz Peak	3347	Mt. Dawson, Selkirks	Eduard Feuz Sr.
Haesler Peak	3387	Mt. Dawson, Selkirks	Christian Haesler Sr.
Michel Peak	3074	Mt. Dawson, Selkirks	Friedrich Michel
Mt. Pollinger	2743	Yoho Valley, Yoho National Park	Joseph Pollinger
Mt. Sarbach	3127	Between Kicking Horse and Howse Pass	Peter Sarbach
Kaufmann Peaks	N: 3109 S: 3094	Between Kicking Horse and Howse Pass	Hans and Christian Kaufmann
Rudolf Peak	3504	Peak I of Mt. Lyell, Banff National Park	Rudolf Aemmer
Edward Peak	3504	Peak II of Mt. Lyell, Banff National Park	Edward Feuz Jr.
Ernest Peak	3504	Peak III of Mt. Lyell, Banff National Park	Ernst Feuz
Walter Peak	3504	Peak IV of Mt. Lyell, Banff National Park	Walter Feuz
Christian Peak	3504	Peak V of Mt. Lyell, Banff National Park	Christian Haesler Jr.
Mt. Perren	3051	Peak V of Valley of the Ten Peaks, Moraine Lake area, Banff National Park	Walter Perren
Swiss Peak and Sulzer Glacier	3205	Mt. Rogers, Selkirks	Carl Sulzer
Mt. Huber	3365	Mt. Victoria, Lake Louise	Emil Huber
Uto Peak	2929	Avalanche Glacier, Selkirks	Sektion Uto of the SAC (Swiss Alpine Club) of which Emil Huber and Carl Sulzer were members <sup>6</sup>

5. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 264.

6. Carl Sulzer and Emil Huber were Swiss climbers but not Swiss certified mountain guides. They made the first ascent of Mt. Sir Donald in the Selkirks in 1890.

# THE WORK OF THE SWISS GUIDES From Mountain Guide to Stuntman



Swiss guides leading party on Illecillewaet Glacier BC ca. 1900. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-1464.

## WORK OF THE MOUNTAIN GUIDES

The first and second generation of Swiss guides that came to work for the CPR between 1899 and 1911 were hired as seasonal workers from May to September. During this period, the majority of them were stationed at CPR's Mt. Stephen House in Field and at Glacier House in Rogers Pass BC. At this time, the Illecillewaet Glacier reached almost to Glacier House and was a main tourist attraction. Nearly all of the guides had a first grade Swiss certified *Führerpatent*<sup>1</sup> which qualified them to direct the most difficult tours in the mountains and on the ice. However, in the early years, most of them led relatively easy and short tours.<sup>2</sup> Their main duty was to chop steps with an ice axe and then rope the clients up the towers of ice seracs and crevasses.<sup>3</sup>

In the following years the guides' activities would shift from glacier and trail tours to actual mountaineering tours and in addition to working for CPR guests, the Swiss

guides also were hired for the annual climbing camps organized by the *Alpine Club of Canada* (ACC). In most cases, one rope party hired two guides for a tour. One guide would lead the party and one guide would be at the end of the group. Their clients were impressed by the skills of the "real Swiss *Bergführer*"<sup>4</sup>. However, the steep ascents of the mountains were not the main challenge for the guides. What bothered the Swiss guides most were the relatively long trips to access the mountains by canoeing, horse riding and camping activities that they were not necessarily familiar with.<sup>5</sup>

1. Word for mountain guide license in German.
2. Even though Walter Feuz was the only one among the Swiss who didn't have a Swiss certified guiding license he soon established a reputation as excellent guide. Nobs 1987, 203.
3. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 137-138.
4. German word for mountain guide.
5. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 137-140.



## OFF-SEASON WORK

In the summer, the guides found plenty of work through mountaineering but the winter was more problematic. As climbing in the winter was not yet common, the guides were forced to find other forms of work to occupy their time. The Swiss guides who didn't return to Switzerland during the winter mostly worked as caretakers for the CPR hotels which were closed during that time.

Beginning in the 1920s, the Swiss guides also found employment by ushering Hollywood film producers and their crews around the spectacular scenery of Lake Louise and Banff. Eventually, guides such as Rudolph Aemmer, Edmond Petrig and Bruno Engler even made careers as stuntmen and supporting actors, playing next to stars such as John Barrymore and Marilyn Monroe.<sup>6</sup>

6. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 216-218.



(L-R) Christian Haesler Jr., Walter Feuz (unverified) and Ed Feuz Jr. at an *Alpine Club of Canada* camp, n.d. Byron Harmon photograph, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V263-NG-0071.



Off-season work: Swiss guides shovelling snow off the roof of Glacier House, n.d. Byron Harmon photograph, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V263-NA-1360.



Actor John Barrymore (L) and guide Rudolph Aemmer (R) during the filming of "Eternal Love" at Lake Louise, 1928. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-2123.

# ENGELHARD, BENHAM, AND CO. Famous Customers of the Swiss Guides



Ernst Feuz with famous American climber Georgia Engelhard on snow ridge below summit of Mt. Victoria, Banff National Park, 1931. Photograph courtesy of Canadian Pacific Archives NS-85.

## FAMOUS CUSTOMERS OF THE SWISS GUIDES

Once the Swiss guides had established their reputation as competent guides, clients came from all over the world to climb with them. Some of the clients were

famous and accomplished amateur climbers who became regular customers.<sup>1</sup>

**“SHE WAS TOUGH AND WIRY AND CLIMBED SO FAST SHE OFTEN HAD US GUIDES PUFFING TO KEEP UP”<sup>2</sup>**

One of the prominent female climbers at the time and a regular customer of the Feuz brothers was the American artist Georgia Engelhard. After Engelhard's visit to the Alps as a teenager, she became dedicated to climbing. Engelhard was particularly famous for her outstanding endurance and stamina. In 1929, she climbed nine major peaks in nine days. Engelhard's accomplishments include 32 successful first ascents in the Rockies and Selkirks.<sup>3</sup>

Katie Gardiner and Gertrude Benham of the UK were two other renowned female climbers at that time. Gardiner, who completed 33 first ascents, climbed with guides Walter Feuz and Chris Haesler Jr.

1. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 23.

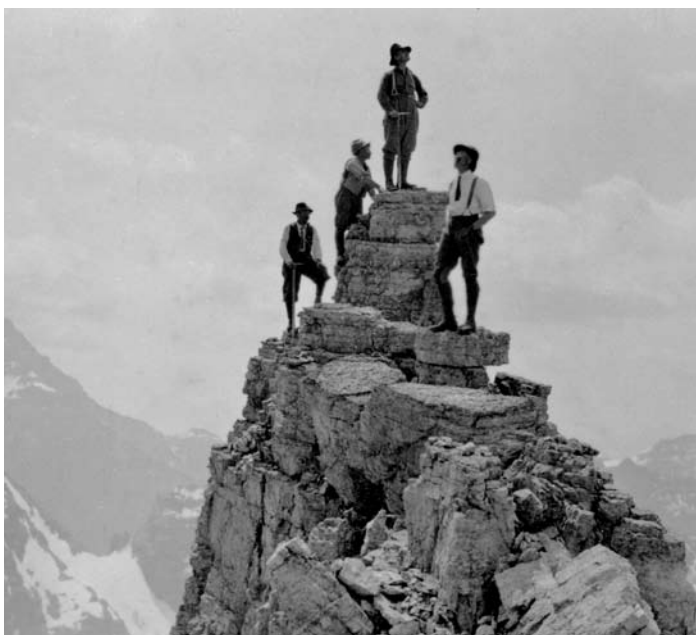
2. Cit. by Ed Feuz Jr. about Georgia Engelhard, in A.J. Kauffman and W.L. Putnam, *The Guiding Spirit*, 1986, 124.

3. C. Smith, *Off the Beaten Track*, 1989, 237-257.





Ernst Feuz and Georgia Engelhard on Mt. Victoria, Banff National Park, 1931. Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Archives NA-4868-197.



L-R: Rudolph Aemmer and Ed Feuz Jr. with well-known American climber Val Fynn and Basil Gordon on summit of Abbot Pass (2925m), ca. 1911. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-1283.



Right: Swiss guide and unidentified female climber, n.d. Photograph courtesy of Canadian Pacific Archives NS-6698-r.

During her only visit to the Canadian Rockies in the summer of 1904, Benham impressed the mountaineering community with the challenging climbs she made together with guides Hans and Christian Kaufmann. Benham was also the first woman to conquer Mt. Assiniboine, which was a very difficult climb at the time.<sup>4</sup>

The Swiss guides appreciated their female customers. Ed Feuz Jr. once stated: *"The greatest joy of all was the women we had on first ascents because they were so much more eager than men."*<sup>5</sup>

The most renowned climbing couple at that time was Phyl and Don Munday. Based in Vancouver BC, the Mundays mainly climbed in the Coastal Mountains. Led by Austrian guide Conrad Kain, Phyl Munday was the first woman to climb Mt. Robson. The Mundays also attended many *Alpine Club of Canada* camps where they

likely climbed with a number of Swiss guides. A lifelong dream of the Mundays was to climb Mt. Waddington BC and in 1933 and 1934, Swiss guide Hans Fuhrer and his client Henry Hall invited them on their expedition to the mountain. Unfortunately, this dream did not come true because of the risks associated with this climb.<sup>6</sup>

American Val Fynn was also an acknowledged amateur climber who often climbed with guide Rudolph Aemmer. In 1922, Fynn and Aemmer ascended the northeast face of Mt. Victoria. It was a climb they had aspired to for four years and one of the most difficult ascents of that decade.<sup>7</sup>

4. C. Smith, *Off the Beaten Track*, 1989, 220-236; 125-134.

5. A.J. Kauffman and W.L. Putnam, *The Guiding Spirit*, 1986, 121.

6. C. Scott, *Pushing the Limits*, 2000, 112-113.

7. C. Scott, *Pushing the Limits*, 2000, 160.



# LAKE LOUISE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ABBOT HUT

## The “Only True Alpine Hut in Canada”<sup>1</sup>



Built by Swiss guides in 1922/1923: The Abbot Hut on the saddle between Mt. Lefroy and Mt. Victoria, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V200-PA-81b.

## THE SWISS GUIDES AT THE CHATEAU LAKE LOUISE

In 1899, the CPR built a humble wooden chalet on the shores of Lake Louise. The site offered stunning views of the emerald-green lake and a unique vista of Mt. Lefroy and Mt. Victoria. This chalet would gradually grow to become the famous Fairmont Chateau Lake Louise.

As mountaineering activity moved from Rogers Pass BC to Lake Louise AB in the 1920s, the CPR decided to

construct a cottage for the Swiss guides near the hotel. Inspired by Swiss architectural motifs, the guides' house was supposed to contribute to the Swiss ambience that the CPR promoted abroad. For years, the Swiss guides and their Swiss chalet attracted many tourists that stayed at the elegant Chateau Lake Louise.<sup>2</sup>



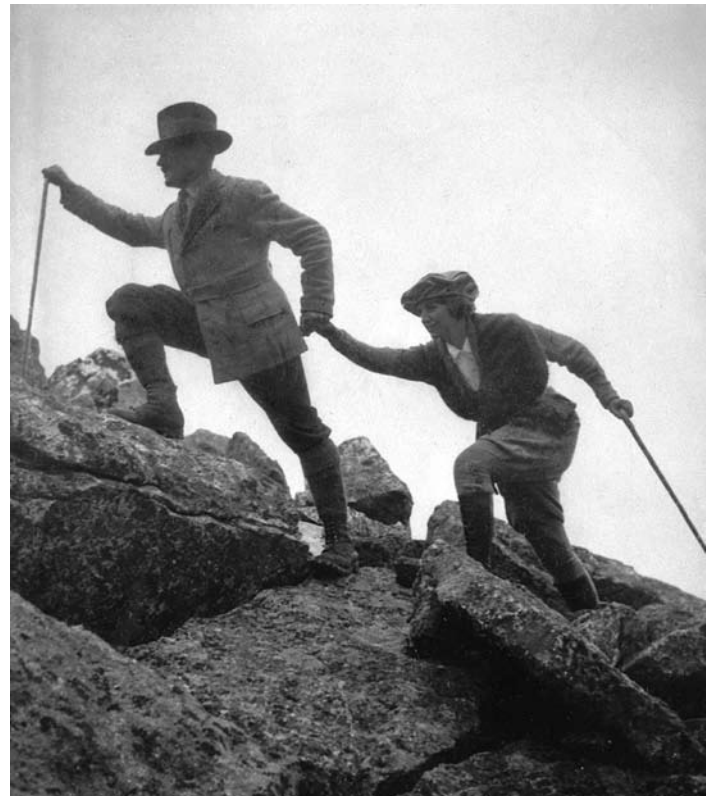
The Chateau Lake Louise wooden building before it burned down, between 1903 and 1912. Byron Harmon photograph, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V263-NA-4834.



The guides' chalet at Chateau Lake Louise, Top L-R: Guide Walter Feuz, boatman Mr. Dennican, guide Rudolph Aemmer on the steps, and unidentified woman, 1925. Photograph courtesy Canadian Pacific Archives, Bridgen Photographic Collection A.28852.

## THE CONSTRUCTION OF ABBOT HUT (2925M)

With the growing interest in mountaineering at Lake Louise, more guests wished to climb Mt. Lefroy and Mt. Victoria. Due to concerns over safety and the endurance of the climbers, Swiss guide Ed Feuz Jr. suggested building a shelter with his fellow guides on the narrow saddle which separated the two peaks. This is when the difficult construction of the Abbot Hut<sup>3</sup> began. The only route to the pass from Lake Louise led through a section that was overhung on the Mt. Victoria side by unpredictable ice known as the “Death Trap”. The guides had to transport everything from cement, lime, bolts, windows, timbers, stove, tools, beds, mattresses, bedding, cutlery, and sufficient food up the crevasse to the Death Trap by horse. From there, the material was carried on the guide’s backs. In 1923, the Abbot Hut opened and made climbing possible and safe for many of Lake Louise’s adventuresome guests. For fifty years, the Abbot Hut was the highest permanent building in Canada and was, in Ed Feuz’s opinion, the only true alpine hut in Canada.<sup>4</sup>



Guide Ed Feuz Jr. and Chateau Lake Louise guest on Saddleback near Lake Louise, ca. 1910. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-2116.

1. Cit. by Ed Feuz Jr. in R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 29.

2. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 203-204.

3. The hut is named after mountaineer Philip Stanley Abbot who died on his first attempt to climb Mt. Lefroy in 1896.

4. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 28-29.



# EDELWEISS VILLAGE

## A Swiss Colony in Golden BC



Guide Walter Feuz with children: (L-R) Doris, Paul, Ronnie, Anne and Syd at *Edelweiss Village*, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the Feuz family.

## A PERMANENT HOME FOR THE SWISS GUIDES AND THEIR FAMILIES

Commuting back and forth from Canada to Switzerland between the seasons eventually became a burden for the second generation of Swiss guides working for the CPR. Not only didn't they want to leave their wives and children back in Switzerland for such long periods, but the travelling itself was time consuming. The CPR management gradually became aware of the guide's unsatisfying situation and came up with the plan to build a permanent home for the guides and their families. That is when the idea of *Edelweiss Village*, a picturesque

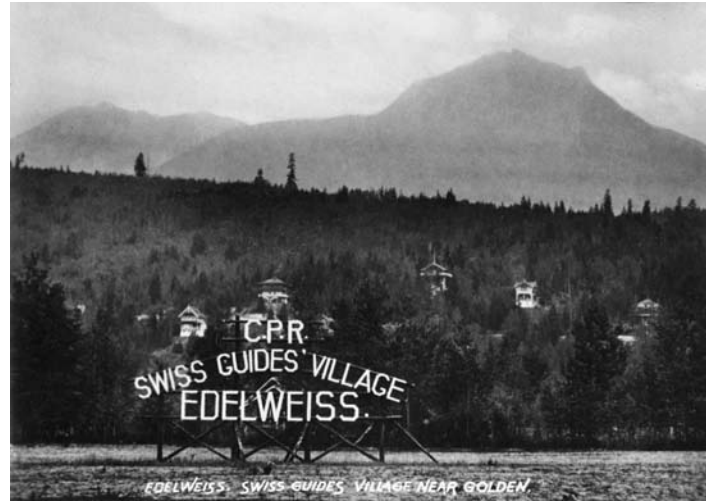
Swiss colony in Golden BC was born. Even though located on the main rail track, Golden was at this point pretty isolated and could use the attraction of resident Swiss guides. In 1912, the six chalets of *Edelweiss Village* were ready to move into by the Swiss mountain guide families.<sup>1</sup>

In retrospective, the objectives of *Edelweiss Village* were only partly successful. Built on a bench above the railway tracks two kilometres west of town, the site was too





At *Edelweiss Village* in front of the Haesler family house, in the background Ed Feuz' house, ca. 1919. L-R: Walter & Johanna Feuz, Martha Feuz, Rosa & Chris Haesler, Elise & Ernest Feuz with children Hedi Feuz, Walter Haesler, Gertrud Feuz and Ernie Feuz. Photograph courtesy of the Feuz family.



*Edelweiss Village* sign with chalets in the background, view from the railway track, Golden BC, n.d.. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-1183.

far from Golden's centre to be convenient for the wives and children, especially during the years when there were no cars around yet. The houses were drafty and cold in the winter and very hot in the summer. Gradually, some of the Swiss families moved to downtown Golden. Moreover, not one of the architects undertook a serious examination of an original Swiss Alpine chalet and as a result their designs didn't have much in common with an authentic Swiss Bernese chalet style. The somehow negligent design was best reflected by the incorrect inscription of the house doors. Instead of saying "Willkommen", meaning welcome, the inscription said "Lebe Wohl", meaning "farewell".<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to the descendants of Walter Feuz, all of the original buildings that comprised the *Edelweiss Village* can still be found today. Walter Feuz's chalet has been maintained as it was when it was occupied by his family and has been lovingly decorated with memorabilia, pictures and stories of the early era of the Swiss mountaineers.<sup>3</sup>



Arrival in Golden BC, L-R: Elise & Ernest Feuz, Ed Feuz Jr., Rosa & Chris Haesler, Clara & Rudolph Aemmer and Johanna Feuz. Photograph taken by Walter Feuz, 1912. Photograph courtesy of the Feuz family.

1. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 175-179.
2. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 183-185.
3. I. Spaar, Interview with Jean Vaughan (b. Feuz), Sep. 2009.

# THE WIVES OF THE GUIDES Silent Heroes behind the Scenes



Swiss guides and their wives in Liverpool on their way to Montreal, 1912. Bottom L-R: Walter Feuz, Clara Aemmer, Rosa Haesler, Elise Feuz, Martha Feuz, Top L-R: Rudolph Aemmer, Christian Haesler, Ernst Feuz, Ed Feuz Jr. Photograph taken by Johanna Feuz, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-1268.

## SILENT HEROES BEHIND THE SCENES

In all the stories that are written about the CPR Swiss guides, very little is mentioned about their wives. Even though the Swiss guides earned great respect and admiration for the work they did, little is known about the Swiss wives and their life in Canada. What is known is that while their husbands were sometimes gone for months to climb mountains, Swiss wives were left at home to look after their children, as well as to handle household maintenance and administrative work. These time consuming tasks were done under difficult circumstances in a country foreign to them.

The women were not fluent in English in these early days and they missed their friends and family back in their home country. Fortunately, there were a number of Scandinavian families, themselves immigrants, living around *Edelweiss Village* with whom the Swiss women became friends. Other contributions by the Swiss wives included their unexcelled handicrafts and knitted fashions which became famous in the community.<sup>1</sup>



L-R: The three sisters Clara, Johanna and Martha Heimann in Grindelwald, Switzerland, n.d. Johanna and Martha came to Golden BC in 1912. Martha married Ed Feuz. Jr. and Johanna became the wife of Walter Feuz. Photograph courtesy of the Feuz family.



Swiss wife with children, *Edelweiss Village* in the background, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the Golden & District Museum Golden BC.

## THE PERSPECTIVE OF A MOUNTAIN GUIDE'S WIFE

Margaret Gmoser, mother of two, was married to legendary Austrian mountain guide and heli-skiing pioneer Hans Gmoser for forty years. She remembers:

"The wives or partners of the mountain guides had to be very independent and take care of all family matters and the children. Probably the more difficult times were when the husbands or partners came home for their time off. They expected you to drop whatever you were doing to accommodate them. This wasn't always easy when you had a routine with the children or things organized for the family.

I have to say that I never worried for my husband's safety. It doesn't do you any good to be fearful for them – you have to trust their judgment and experience. Otherwise I don't think you could sleep at night.

The most challenging part of the relationship is to keep the trust in your marriage. The most rewarding part is being able to meet very interesting people from all walks of life. There is also the possibility to visit beautiful

mountain areas and know that you are in the safest hands with your partner. If both of you love the mountains this will be a great bonding tool for your marriage.

I wouldn't change my wish to be a wife of a mountain guide for any other situation."<sup>2</sup>



Enjoying family time: Swiss guides and their wives with children, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V200-PA44-497.

1. Baeda Feuz in C. Palumbo, *Golden Memories*, 2000, 265-267.
2. I. Spaar, Interview with Margaret Gmoser, Nov. 2009.



# A NEW APPRECIATION OF THE MOUNTAINS



Guide Chris Haesler and Joan Oliver admiring the spectacular mountain scenery, Lake Louise Area AB 1936. Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Archives NA-4868-247.

## A NEW APPRECIATION

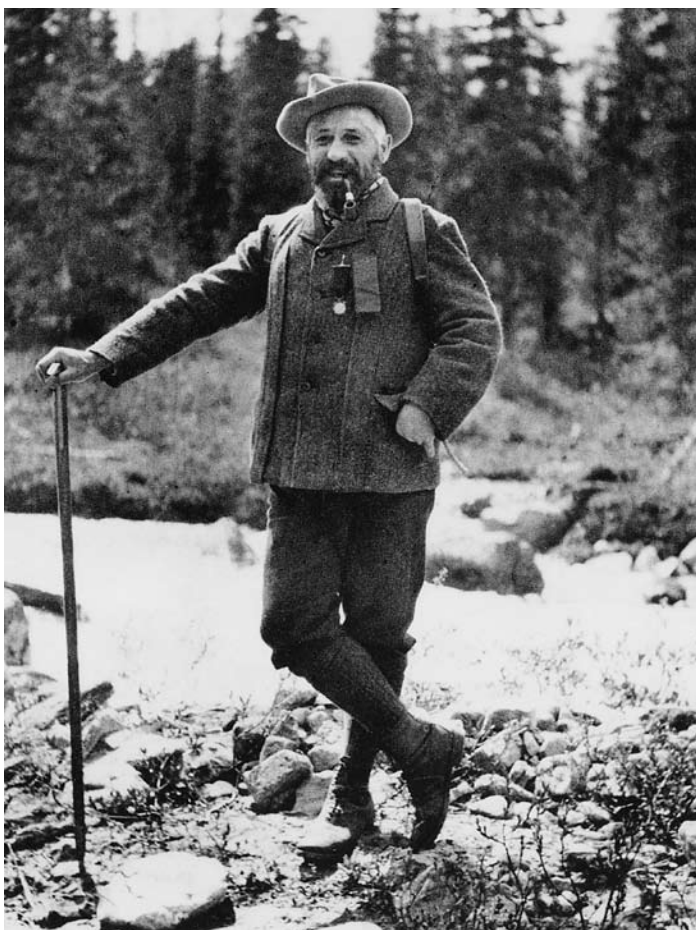
It is important to note that early Swiss and other European guides in western Canada were not only instrumental in teaching new and safe climbing techniques but also for instilling a new appreciation of mountains and mountain environments. After the arrival of these early guides, Canadian's interest in mountains gradually shifted: The mountains were no longer seen as barriers

but as destinations in their own right with a unique alpine aesthetic. In this sense, the early Swiss *Bergführer*<sup>1</sup>, among others, helped to inspire local mountaineers through their guiding activities. Over time, local climbers became passionate advocates of their overwhelming Canadian mountain heritage.<sup>2</sup>

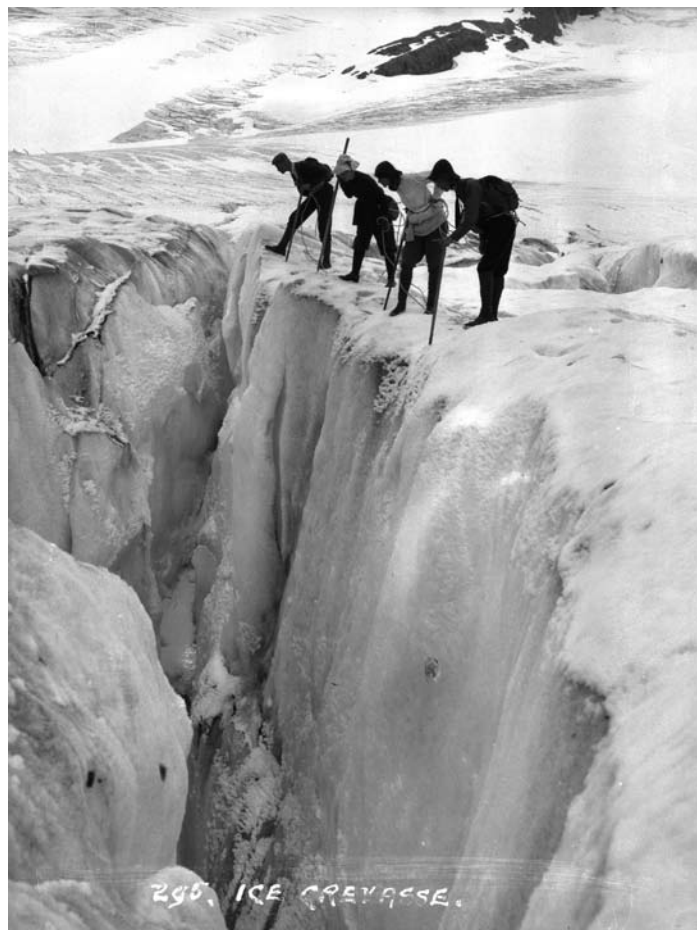
## THE ALPINE CLUB OF CANADA (ACC)

One local mountaineer who had a strong appreciation of mountains was Canadian surveyor, Arthur O. Wheeler. He tirelessly lobbied for the creation of a national

alpine club and in 1906, Wheeler and journalist Elizabeth Parker from Winnipeg MB founded the *Alpine Club of Canada*.



Arthur O. Wheeler, one of the founding members of the *Alpine Club of Canada*, 1913. Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Archives NA-4376-10.



Discovering local mountain aesthetic, *Alpine Club of Canada* Camp at Mt. Robson, 1913. Byron Harmon photograph, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V263-NA-1287.

The organization's activities were supported by both the Canadian Government and Canadian Pacific, which supplied equipment and the services of at least two Swiss guides to their annual mountaineering camps. Over the next 23 years, Swiss guides, such as the brothers Ed Feuz Jr. and Ernst Feuz, their cousin Gottfried Feuz, Rudolph Aemmer and Peter Kaufmann, worked for the ACC camps. One exception was the year 1926 when the camp was held in Jasper and Swiss guides Hans and Heinrich Fuhrer from the *Canadian National Railway* (CNR) provided their services. The annual ACC camps enabled hundreds of middle-class Canadians, who could not have otherwise afforded the services of professional mountain guides, to discover the adventures of climbing.<sup>3</sup>

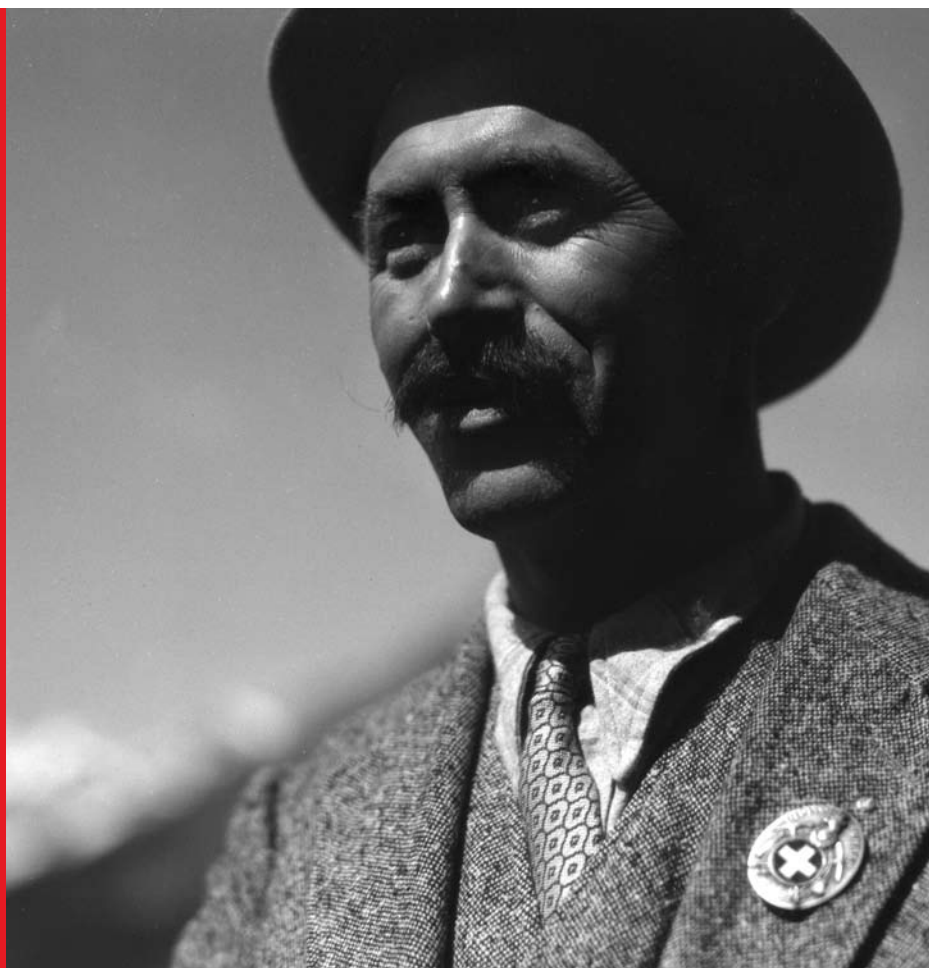


Happy times: Guide Rudolph Aemmer with members of the *Alpine Club of Canada* on the summit of Neptuak Mountain AB 1923. Photograph courtesy of the Glenbow Archives NA-4460-30.

1. German word for mountain guide.
2. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 19.
3. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 19-21; R.W. Sandford, *At the Top*, 1996, 11; B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 142.



# THE END OF A GOLDEN ERA...



Portrait of Rudolph Aemmer, one of the guides from the Golden Era, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies, V408-NA14-157.

## ...AND A NEW ERA TO COME



Three generations of Swiss mountain guides: (L-R) Rudi Gertsch, Ed Feuz Jr., and Bruno Engler during the filming of CBC-TV's "This Land", 1968. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-1985.

The Chateau Lake Louise retained its mountain guide services until the end of the 1954 climbing season even though the Great Depression and World War II had a devastating effect on mountain tourism. In 1950, the CPR hired Edmund Petrig and Walter Perren, its last two Swiss guides. When their contracts expired in 1954, it brought to an end the Golden Era of Swiss guides after an astonishing 55 years.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the end of this Golden Era, there were new generations of Swiss guides to follow. Guides such as Bruno Engler, Walter Perren, and Hans Schwarz were about to continue the legacy of their fellow Swiss. Part of the Feuz legacy continued with Syd Feuz, the son of CPR guide Walter Feuz.



16 year old Syd Feuz skiing at a hill in Lake Louise that later becomes the Lake Louise Ski Area & Mountain Resort, 1939. Photograph courtesy of Rudi Gertsch.



Three generations of heli-ski guides: (L-R) Jeff Gertsch, Rudi Gertsch and Syd Feuz, 2004. Photograph courtesy of Rudi Gertsch.

## SYD FEUZ: “I LEARNED EVERYTHING FROM MY FATHER AND THE OTHER SWISS GUIDES”<sup>2</sup>

The first Canadian-Swiss guide, Syd Feuz, is today considered to be a mountain guide legend. Born in 1922 in Golden BC, he grew up in the Swiss Edelweiss Village. From his early childhood on, Syd was introduced to skiing, climbing and hiking through his father, Walter Feuz, and other Swiss guides. Syd started guiding at Temple Lodge near Lake Louise Mountain Resort at the age of sixteen. In 1973, he took an Assistant Guide’s course with the *Association of Canadian Mountain Guides* (ACMG). For nearly 30 years, he worked as a heli-ski guide for *Purcell Helicopter Skiing Ltd.*

Syd showed an early passion for skiing. He skied on Victoria Glacier and around Lake Louise years before the existence of a ski area. In Golden BC, he skied on

the hill that today is known as Kicking Horse Mountain Resort. Its location can be attributed to the pursuits of Syd and his colleagues. To honour his contribution to the Golden community, where he lived with his wife Baeda for many years, Syd Feuz was chosen as the community’s 2010 Olympic Torchbearer.<sup>3</sup>

1. R.W. Sanford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 36.
2. Cit. by Syd Feuz in H. Caverhill: *Syd Feuz: Legendary Mountain Guide*, in *Kicking Horse Magazine* 2009, 15.
3. H. Caverhill, *Syd Feuz: Legendary Mountain Guide*, in *Kicking Horse Magazine* 2009, 14-15; *Olympic Torchbearer Announced*, *The Golden Star. Net*, Dec. 2 2009.

# 1950-1970 Canadian Mountaineering Takes on a Fresh Look



Rudi Gertsch climbing high. Bruno Engler photograph (note: also the photographer had to climb high to take this picture), courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.

## CLIMBING: A SEARCH FOR ONE'S PERSONAL LIMITS

By the 1960s and early 1970s, Canadian mountaineering took on a fresh look and a new direction through the influence of young immitly inspired Canadian-born climbers. The climbing culture changed quiet a bit as new climbing variations developed such as winter alpinism and waterfall climbing. Perhaps a more crucial change occurred in the nature of climbing itself: Climbing became the search for one's personal limits and the ultimate emotional experience. For 100 years, climbing

was the sport of wealthy people. From the 1950s on, climbing became the new sport for people from all social classes.<sup>1</sup>

## A NEW GENERATION OF SWISS MOUNTAINEERS

Most of the Swiss mountaineers that came to Canada in the 1960s and 1970s were Swiss certified mountain guides and some of them also had their ski instructor diploma which was perfect for ski tour guiding and heli-ski guiding. The expertise of Swiss guides would be crucial for this new adventure.





Swiss guides Rudi Gertsch and Peter Schlunegger teaching rock school, with Bugaboo Spire in background, ca. 1973. Photograph courtesy of Lloyd Gallagher.



There was also a small group of Swiss mountaineers that came to Canada not to pursue the mountain guide profession but to pursue climbing as a hobby. Among them was Urs Kallen, who arrived in Canada in 1965 and soon built up a solid record of difficult climbs. He is best known for his new routes on Yamnuska AB (CMC Wall 1972, Yellow Edge 1974) that he climbed together with Billy Davidson. These two aid routes<sup>2</sup> were great achievements for their day.<sup>3</sup>

Another passionate climber who immigrated to Canada was Peter Jungen. Before arriving in the Rockies in 1973,



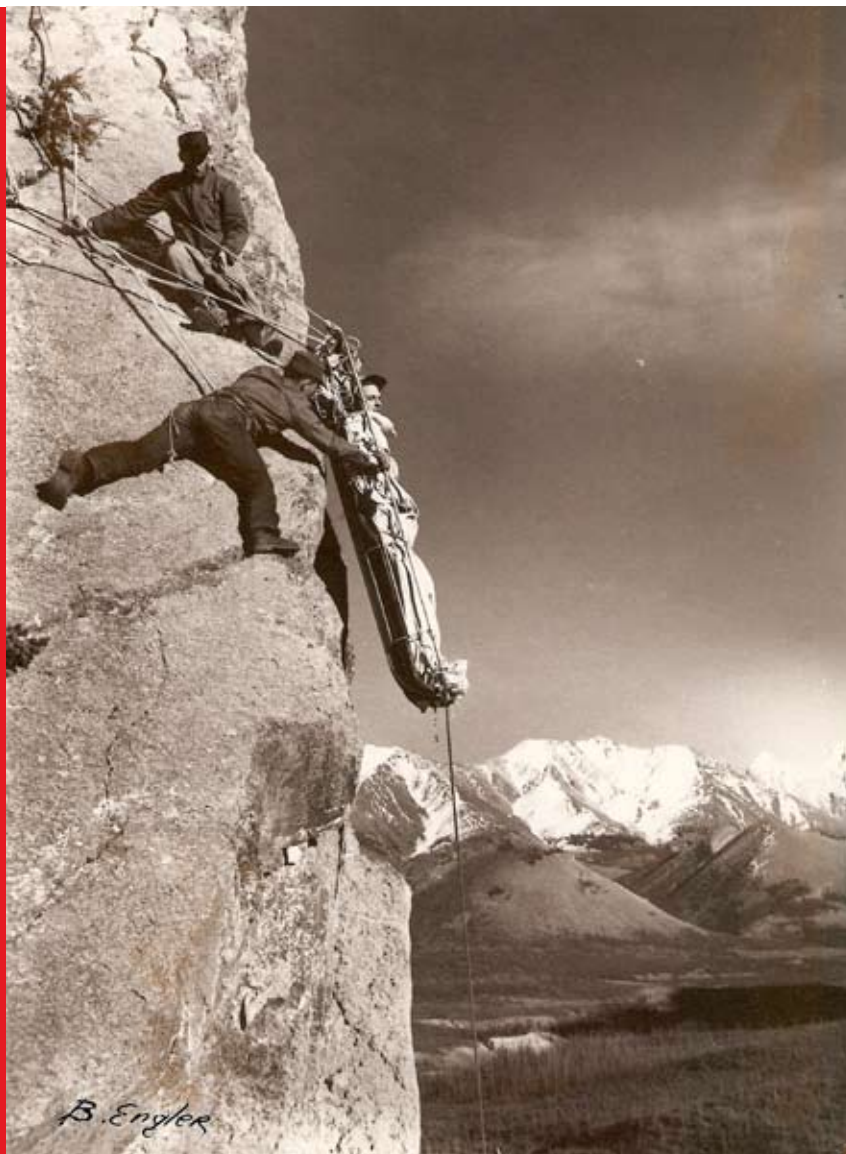
The climbing party of the first winter ascent of the Japanese Direttissima route on the Swiss Eiger North Face, winter 1969/70: L-R Hans Mueller, Otto von Allmen, Peter Jungen, Hans-Peter Trachsel, and Max Doerflinger. Photograph courtesy of Peter Jungen.

Left: L-R: Swiss climber Urs Kallen and Billy Davidson before their hike up to CMC wall, June 1972. Photograph courtesy of Urs Kallen.

Jungen impressed the international climbing community with the first winter ascent of the Japanese Direttissima route on the Swiss Eiger North Face in the winter of 1969/70, an adventure that took Jungen and his group 21 days with 13 *bivouacs*<sup>4,5</sup>

1. C. Scott, *Pushing the Limits*, 2000, 167.
2. Routes where devices are fixed or placed in order to make upward progress.
3. C. Scott, *Pushing the Limits*, 2000, 184.
4. Encampment for a night.
5. Peter Jungen, *Winterbegehung der Japaner-Direttissima an der Eigernordwand*, 1971.

# MOUNTAIN RESCUE Swiss Expertise Wanted



One of Walter Perren's mountain rescue training, Banff National Park, n.d., Bruno Engler photograph, courtesy of Monod Sports Ltd.

## THE NEED FOR A MOUNTAIN RESCUE TRAINING PROGRAM

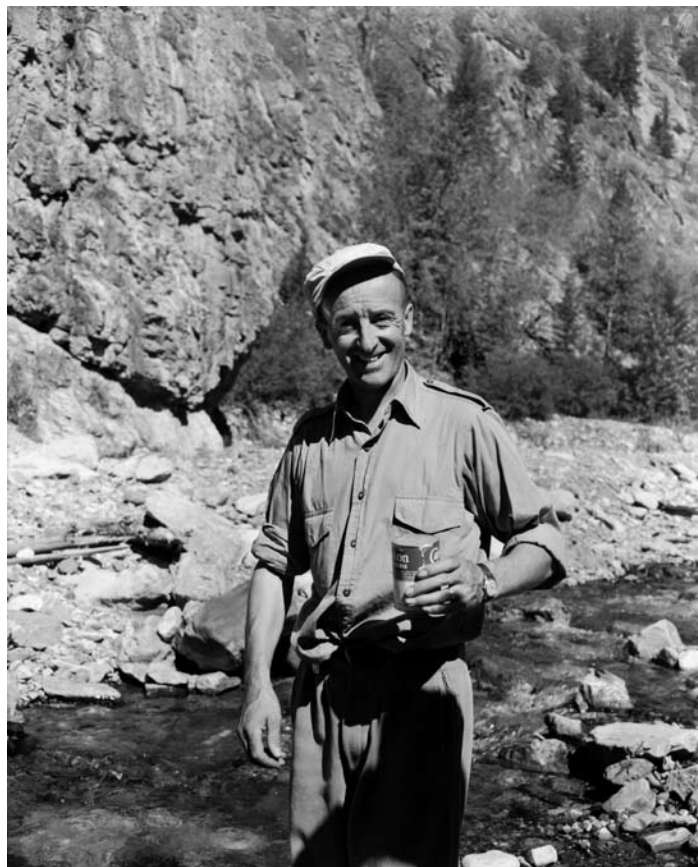
As the national parks in western Canada became popular in the summer and winter, the need for supervising visitor safety increased. Since the inception of the warden service in Canada's national parks in 1909, it was the warden's duty to oversee the visitor's protection. The early park wardens, however, didn't have the required expertise necessary for mountain rescue. As a result, the CPR Swiss guides often led the wardens in mountain rescuing after a fatality occurred. In the 1950s,

the number of accidents consequently increased. With the loss of expertise provided by the Swiss CPR guides after 1954 and the ever growing demand for rescue response, it was becoming clear that the *Warden Park Service* would have to develop its own internal rescue abilities. It was Swiss guide Walter Perren who was chosen by the superintendents of Banff, Jasper and Yoho National Parks to develop such abilities.<sup>1</sup>





Walter Perren giving climbing instructions to Park Warden Olle Hermanrud, Banff National Park, 1956. Bruno Engler photograph, courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.



Walter Perren: The father of modern mountain rescue in Canada's National Parks, n.d. Bruno Engler photograph, courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.

## WALTER PERREN: THE FATHER OF MODERN MOUNTAIN RESCUE IN CANADA'S NATIONAL PARKS

Legend tells that as soon as Walter Perren arrived in 1950 at Lake Louise after the long trip from Switzerland, he stepped off the train and “stretched his legs” with a climb of the needles between Mt. White and Mt. Niblock. Perren came from a famous family of Swiss mountain guides in Zermatt, home village of the legendary Matterhorn that he climbed not less than 140 times.

After his contract with CPR ended in the autumn of 1954, Perren stayed in Banff with his family. By February 1955, he received an offer to work for the Canadian National Parks Service. Under Perren, mountain rescue as an integral component of the warden function had

begun. Eventually, Perren became the *Chief Warden of Mountaineering Services*, a position that soon after evolved into the roles of the *National Parks Alpine Specialists*. He pioneered the use of the helicopter as an aid for transport in rescues and instituted the technical rope and cable systems that form the basis of today's system.<sup>2</sup>

1. B. White, *Development of Avalanche Safety and Control Programs in the Canadian Rocky Mountain National Parks*, 2002.
2. R.W. Sandford, *At the Top*, 1996, 23; B. White, *Development of Avalanche Safety and Control Programs in the Canadian Rocky Mountain National Parks*, 2002.



# PAVING THE WAY FOR A STRONG CANADIAN AVALANCHE SAFETY SYSTEM



Avalanche on Mt. Brewster AB, 1965. Bruno Engler photograph, courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.

# THE NEED FOR AVALANCHE CONTROL

The demand for an avalanche control in western Canada was relatively moderate until the mid 1960's. Before that time, the only institutions that showed a keen interest in avalanche control were the national parks such as Banff. A broader interest in avalanche control was generated when a number of avalanche fatalities occurred in the mid 1960s and especially during the winter of 1971-72, which was one of the most disastrous avalanche seasons in Canadian history. Suddenly, mining, railway, and hydro companies as well as national highway departments asked for avalanche consulting and oversight. Ski resorts and heli-skiing companies also started to look into avalanche risk management. As a matter of fact, not only avalanche control systems were needed, but also people who were appropriately trained in avalanche forecasting. The person who greatly influenced today's strong Canadian avalanche safety system was Swiss Peter Schaerer.<sup>1</sup>

## PETER SCHAEERER: THE FATHER OF AVALANCHE SAFETY IN CANADA

Peter Schaerer developed all the background knowledge in avalanche forecasting and control for this country and set up professional avalanche training programs that now are internationally recognized. With a diploma as a civil engineer in his pocket, he came from Bern to Canada in 1957 to work for the *National Research Council* to help develop avalanche control systems for the Trans Canada Highway at Rogers Pass in Glacier National Park. For more than 40 years, Schaerer held the position of *Senior Research Officer* and *Head of the Avalanche Research Center* at the *National Research Council* of Canada.



L-R: Geoff Freer and Peter Schaerer observing a snow profile in Rogers Pass BC, January 1973. Photograph courtesy of Peter Schaerer.

Peter Schaerer receives the Order of Canada for his contributions to avalanche safety work in Canada and the World by Her Excellency Adrienne Clarkson, Governor General, Ottawa, February 9, 2000. Photograph courtesy of Peter Schaerer.



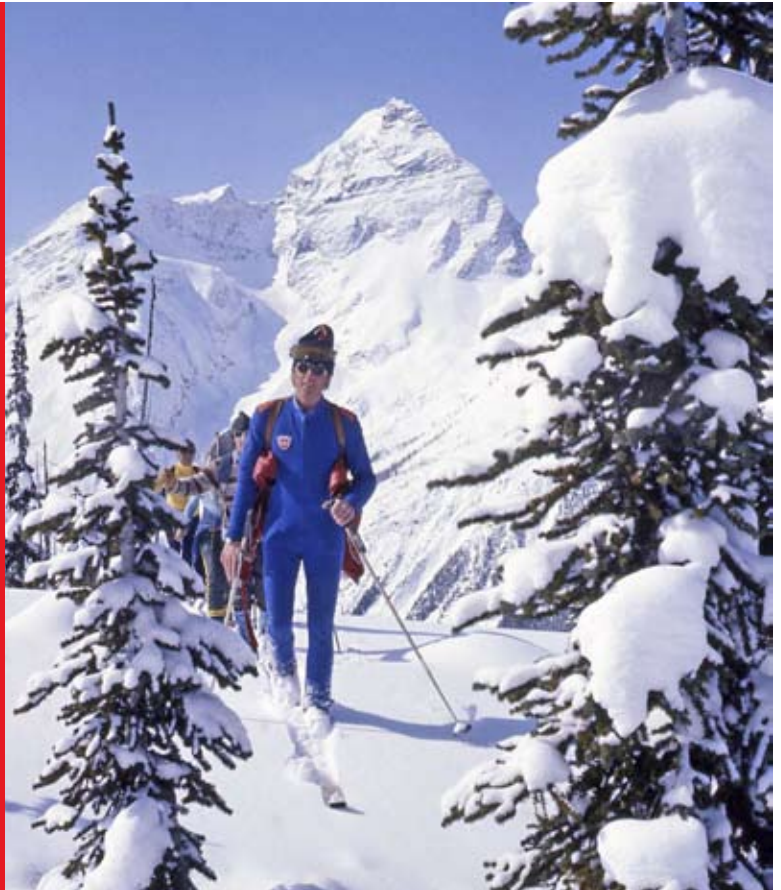
Schaerer also set up the first professional avalanche training programs in western Canada. After the demand for his programs had grown, the *British Columbia Institute of Technology* took over the administration of the courses while Peter became the chief instructor. Throughout his career, Schaerer worked with people such as Geoff Freer, Chris Stethem and David McClum, who continue to play an important role in Canada's avalanche and mountaineering community. Schaerer, who was also instrumental in the formation of the *Canadian Avalanche Association* (CAA), was awarded the Order of Canada for his contributions to avalanche safety work in Canada and the world in 2000.<sup>2</sup>

1. I. Spaar, Interview with Peter Schaerer, Oct. 2009.

2. I. Spaar, Interview with Peter Schaerer, Oct. 2009.



# SWISS IMPACT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE GUIDING PROFESSION IN CANADA



Swiss guide Hans-Peter Stettler leads a ski touring trip in Rogers Pass, Mt. Sir Douglas in the back, 1974. Stettler represented Canada at the *International Federation of Mountain Guides Association (IFMGA)* for almost 20 years. Photograph courtesy of Rudi Gertsch.

## THE FORMATION OF THE *ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN MOUNTAIN GUIDES (ACMG)*

In the second half of the 20th century, guide exams were conducted by Swiss guide Walter Perren, *Alpine Specialist for Parks Canada*. Because of constraints on his time, he proposed to his assistant Hans Gmoser in 1958 the creation of a mountain guides association in Canada which, under the combined auspices of the *Alpine Club of Canada (ACC)* and *Parks Canada*, would formally undertake responsibilities for guide training and certification.<sup>1</sup> Following Perren's important suggestion, the *Association of Canadian Mountain Guides (ACMG)* was founded in 1963. Its charter members were: Swiss Hans Schwarz and Bruno Engler, Austrians Hans Gmoser, Leo Grillmair, Willi Pfisterer, and Frank Stark, Germans Peter Fuhrmann, Heinz Kahl, and British Brian Greenwood, Dick Lofthouse and Eric Lomas.

Initially, the ACMG standards were often underestimated by the candidates. High failure rates to achieve ACMG guiding licences caused an intense debate about the applicability of European standards to Canadian climbing. As a consequence of this debate, a more rigorous program that included apprenticeship, an assistant guide's accreditation, and a code of guiding ethics was introduced in 1968. Today, the ACMG is a model of professional self-regulation, aimed at protecting the public interest in mountain travel and climbing instruction.<sup>2</sup> The ACMG still maintains its historical ties to *Parks Canada* and the *Alpine Club of Canada*.<sup>3</sup>





Instructors and examiners at an ACMG course ca. 1972: (L-R) Syd Feuz, Mark Kingsbury, Hans Schwarz, Rudi Gertsch, and Peter Fuhrmann. Photograph courtesy of Lloyd Gallagher.

## MEETING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

As the number of mountain guides associations in Europe and North America increased, the need arose for international regulation of uniform professional training standards. In 1965, representatives of mountain guides associations from the traditional Alpine countries Switzerland, Austria, France and Italy met in Zermatt to lay the foundations for the *International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations* (IFMGA).

Keen to become a member of the IFMGA, the Canadian association had to revise its operating standards. Swiss guides Rudi Gertsch and Hans-Peter Stettler tirelessly worked on the required adjustments until, in 1972, the ACMG became the first non European member of the IFMGA. For almost 20 years, Hans-Peter Stettler

voluntarily represented the Canadian association at the annual international association meetings that were held in different places in Europe. By the early 90s, Canada had developed into an important mountain guiding country due to its heli-skiing activities among other things and was recognized as such by the IFMGA. Finally in 1996, the ACMG hosted the first Canadian conference of the IFMGA in Banff with the second one scheduled for 2013 in British Columbia.<sup>4</sup>

1. R.W. Sandford, *At the Top*, 1996, 24; [www.acmg.ca](http://www.acmg.ca).
2. [www.acmg.ca](http://www.acmg.ca).
3. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 39.
4. I. Spaar, Interview with Hans-Peter Stettler and Rudi Gertsch, Sep. 2009; [www.acmg.ca](http://www.acmg.ca)

# HELICOPTER SKIING

**“It was a new frontier. It was something totally new. There was no one who could give us any guidance—we had to figure it out ourselves...”<sup>1</sup>**



Early CMH heli-skiing in the Bugaboos, Vowell Glacier BC, ca. 1970. Jill Durance photograph, courtesy of CMH Heli-Skiing Archives.

## CANADIAN MOUNTAIN HOLIDAYS (CMH): A SUCCESS STORY

There was perhaps no other invention that changed the very nature of mountain guiding in Canada's west more than an adventure that, literally, took off in the mid 60s known as helicopter skiing. For mountain guides, helicopter skiing was the perfect option for a year-round job.

The helicopter skiing business in western Canada was initiated by Austrian mountain guide Hans Gmoser. In 1959, he formed a small company named *Rocky Mountain Guides Limited* that eventually became *Canadian Mountain Holidays* (CMH). Gmoser first offered commercial heli-skiing in the Bugaboos in April of 1965 with



Early *Canadian Mountain Holidays* guides: (L-R) Herbert Bleuer, Leo Grillmair, Kiwi (Lloyd) Gallagher, Hans Gmoser, Rudi Gertsch, Peter Schlunegger, Sepp Renner, Frank Stark and Ernst Buehler, n.d. Bruno Engler photograph, courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.

the help of helicopter pilot Jim Davies. Rapidly, the number of guests increased and so did the demand for experienced mountain guides. As there were few trained Canadian mountain guides who were expert skiers, a large number of Swiss and Austrian guides came to work for CMH. A humble Gmoser stated:

*"I get a lot of credit, but in actuality, in truth, I've just been a very lucky person who met loyal, excellent people who made all of this happen."*<sup>2</sup>

Today, CMH is the world largest heli-skiing/hiking company. In fact, helicopter skiing today is widely associated with Canadian mountain culture.<sup>3</sup>

## SWISS HELI-SKI GUIDES

Among the people that were crucial in helping building up Canada's largest heli-skiing company *Canadian Mountain Holidays* (CMH) were some Swiss mountain guides. Especially in the early CMH years, Gmoser hired some influential guides from Switzerland who in a good humorous sense were otherwise known as the "Swiss Mafia". In addition to being Swiss certified



L-R: Kiwi (Lloyd) Gallagher and "Swiss Mafia" Herb Bleuer, Peter Schlunegger and Rudi Gertsch enjoy a day off from heli-ski guiding, on top of Howser Peak in the BC Bugaboos, ca. 1973. Photograph courtesy of Lloyd Gallagher.

mountain guides, some of them brought years of experience as ski racers with them and others were qualified ski instructors. Rudi Gertsch, Peter Schlunegger, Sepp Renner and Herb Bleuer were among the early Swiss guides who worked for CMH. Gradually, more Swiss guides such as Kobi Wyss, Ernst Buehler, Hans-Peter Stettler, Ernst Salzgeber, Kobi Wyss and J. R. "Colani" Bezzola came to work for CMH. Some of them such as Gertsch and Schlunegger eventually started their own successful heli-skiing businesses. Others such as Bezzola are still with CMH up to today.<sup>4</sup>

Through their expertise in guiding, skiing and mountain safety, the Swiss heli-ski guides had a profound influence on the mountain community and the development of the profession of mountain guiding in Canada.<sup>5</sup>

1. Cit. by Rudi Gertsch in C. Scott, *Deep Powder Steep Rock*, 2009, 278.
2. Cit. by Hans Gmoser in T. Donahue, *Bugaboo Dreams*, 2008, 285.
3. R.W. Sandford, *At the Top*, 1996, 27; [www.canadianmountainholidays.com](http://www.canadianmountainholidays.com)
4. C. Scott, *Deep Powder and Steep Rock*, 249,278; I. Spaar, Interviews with Bezzola, Gertsch, Renner, Salzgeber, Schlunegger, and Stettler, Sep./Nov. 2009.
5. C. Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, 2005, 156.



# SKIING

## A New Sport is Born



L-R: Ed Feuz Jr., unidentified man and Chris Haesler Jr. on skis, 1921. Byron Harmon photograph, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V263-NA71-1394.

## EUROPEAN SKI PIONEERS IN CANADA'S WEST

There is no clear answer to the question who influenced the birth of skiing most in Canada's west. Some argue it was a Swede named Gus Johnson at the 1917 Winter Festival in Banff. Some claim it was famous Austrian mountain guide Conrad Kain who built a run at Banff's Tunnel Mountain in 1910. Others are convinced it was the Swiss guides that stayed in Rogers Pass and Lake Louise for the winter. It has been reported that whenever they could, they skied. In fact, all the Swiss guides that were hired by the CPR after 1940 were also Swiss certified ski instructors.<sup>1</sup> To most locals, skiing was an utterly strange activity, but local children soon recognized the fun in this new sport introduced by the unique looking foreign mountain guides.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1920s and 1930s, the ski community in western Canada started to grow. At Revelstoke BC, ski jumpers were setting new records. Banff AB and the lodges of Assiniboine and Skoki gained in reputation among skiers. North of the Rockies in Jasper AB, new backcountry ski routes were explored. Still, most of the western Canadian ski resorts were in their infancy in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>3</sup> It is partly due to the Swiss ski pioneers and advocates of the sport of skiing that these ski resorts developed into the famous ski destinations they are today.



L-R: Ken Jones and Walter Feuz at the Swiss Guides' Chalet at Chateau Lake Louise, 1934. Photograph Ken Jones collection, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies 0065.

## JOE WEISS: SKI PIONEER IN JASPER

One of the early Swiss ski pioneers in Jasper was Joe Weiss. Born in Zug, Switzerland, he immigrated to Canada in 1921. Weiss discovered the ski potential of today's ski resort Marmot Basin and gave it its name. For many years, he was an advocate of ski development in the Marmot Basin area.<sup>4</sup> Between 1929 and 1933, Weiss went on a remarkable series of ski adventures in the Rockies. He pioneered ski mountaineering through ascending Snow Dome (1932), Resplendent (1932) and came close on Mt. Columbia (1933). As a photographer, Weiss was deeply moved by the outstanding beauty of winter landscapes. A mountain in the Winston Churchill Range of Jasper National Park is named in his honor.<sup>5</sup>



"He looked like he had been carved out of a piece of old oak"<sup>6</sup>, Joe Weiss at Pyramid Lake in Jasper AB. n.d. Courtesy of the Jasper Yellowhead Museum and Archives (PA23-9) Doug Jeffery photograph.

1. B. Nobs, *Vom Eiger in die Rockies*, 1987, 97.
2. R.W. Sandford, *Who was Banff's First Skier?* in Mountain Heritage Magazine, Winter 1999/2000, 4-7.
3. C. Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, 2005, 60.
4. C. Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, 2005, 111.
5. C. Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, 2005, 66-67.
6. Cit. by Sydney Scroggie in C. Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, 2005, 67.

# BRUNO ENGLER

## A Multitalented Mountain Man



Bruno Engler with skis and camera on south peak of Mt. Victoria, 1956. Photograph courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.



# BRUNO ENGLER

Bruno Engler was Banff's most famous skier, mountain guide, photographer, filmmaker and bon vivant. After his arrival in Canada in 1939, Engler first worked as a ski instructor for Jim Brewster at Sunshine Village, a position he would hold for a decade. During the summers, he worked as an assistant with the CPR Swiss guides at the Chateau Lake Louise until 1941. Teaching survival and mountain warfare for the Canadian army, Engler was discharged with the rank of Sergeant in 1946.

Engler's passion for skiing had many faces. Over the years, he played a major role in several unique ski races such as the Veterans race at Sunshine Village. Today, this race is a celebrated ski tradition in the Rockies, known as the "Bruno Engler Memorial Ski Race".<sup>1</sup> He also helped to design a ski area at Blairmore AB in the Crowsnest Pass.<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps his most important contribution to Canadian mountain culture was his work as a film maker and photographer. Many of his films did a great deal to promote climbing and skiing in the Canadian Rockies.<sup>3</sup> Engler received many honorary awards in his life, one of which was the first Banff Mountain Film Festival Summit of Excellence Award. His plaque reads:

*"For his skill in climbing, guiding and skiing; for his magnificent achievements in Canadian mountain photography and cinematography; for his humour and bonhomie; for his legendary storytelling; and for the joy he expresses in the fellowship of men, women and children who are, like him, lovers of the mountains."*<sup>4</sup>

1. C. Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, 2005, 132-133.

2. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 35.

3. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 35.

4. C. Scott, *Powder Pioneers*, 2005, 133.



Bruno Engler in Lake Louise AB, 1975. Photograph courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.



Photograph by Bruno Engler: "Hot Snow" with skier Rudi Gertsch, 1966. Photograph courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.



One of Bruno Engler's famous ski pictures: Rudi Gertsch jumping off the teahouse at Mt. Norquay, AB, 1967. Photograph courtesy of Bruno Engler Archives.



# A VISION FOR BANFF



John Monod, 1948. Photograph courtesy of Monod Sports Ltd.





Lesson anyone? Norquay Ski School: (L-R) T. Clark, D. Robinson, F. Rodly, John Monod (head of the ski school), E. Festor, Swiss Heinz Vivian, and V. Vrani, 1953-54. Photograph courtesy of Monod Sports Ltd.

## JOHN MONOD: A LIFETIME DEVOTION TO SKIING

John Monod's love of skiing led him to become one of the most important figures in the development of the ski industry in the Canadian Rockies. John was considered a world class ski racer in the 1930s in Europe. He then helped to develop the legendary ski resort at Chamonix in the French Alps. In 1947, he immigrated to Canada. John worked with his brother Jerry and Bruno Engler as ski instructors at the Mt. Norquay ski area for most of the 1950s.

John Monod's vision was to bring Banff a winter life through the sport of skiing and he passionately promoted

skiing as an important sport by showing ski movies that he filmed with a team. In 1949, Fern Brewster gave him a small space at Sunshine Village for his first ski shop. Monod also led the ski schools at Mt. Norquay for 4 years and at Sunshine for 11 years. Besides teaching skiing, he continued to operate his ski store which he moved to the Harmon Building in Banff in 1963. Today, the store is managed by John's sons, Phillip, Peter and Nick. Monod Sports Ltd. consistently imported top quality European skiing and climbing equipment and played a key role in mountaineering sports in the Rockies.<sup>1</sup>



Passionate skier Leo Berchtold at a ski race, 1960. Photograph courtesy of Monod Sports Ltd.



Brothers John and Jerry Monod, 1948. Photograph courtesy of Monod Sports Ltd.

## THE SWISS IMPACT ON THE SKI COMMUNITY IN BANFF

Among the Swiss who helped build up the ski community in Banff were Jerry Monod, Heinz Vivian, and Leo Berchtold. John Monod's brother, Jerry, was a ski instructor and coach in Banff. He later moved to the Okanagan Valley where he became influential at local ski schools. Heinz Vivian was the Head of the Mt. Norquay Ski School and later became Head of the Sunshine Ski School, a position he held for many years. Leo Berchtold has been involved in the Banff ski community ever since he immigrated to Canada in 1951. As a certified ski coach and ski instructor, he coached ski race groups such as the Banff Ski Runners and the Calgary

Ski Club, organized ski races such as the Alberta Cup Series on the provincial level and co-founded the *du Maurier* World Cup races.<sup>2</sup>

1. P. Monod, *50 Years of Skiing. A Brief History of Monod Sports 1949-1999*, 1999.
2. I. Spaar, Interview with Leo Berchtold, Dec. 2009.



# BUILDING THE INFRASTRUCTURE

## Swiss Ski Lift Technology



The Super Skyride gondola at Grouse Mountain on the North Shore of Vancouver BC. Photograph courtesy of Grouse Mountain Resorts.

## SWISS SKI LIFT TECHNOLOGY

Swiss ski lift technology came into full operation in western Canada in the mid 1960s. Swiss-based *Mueller Lifts Ltd.*, who also brought competent Swiss employees to Canada, was influential in building the main infrastructure for recreational skiing in eastern and western Canada.



New Mueller gondola at Whistler Mountain during construction Nov.-Dec. 1965. Photograph courtesy of Karl Ernst.

## MUELLER LIFTS LTD., KARL ERNST AND FRED BOSINGER

When Karl Ernst first came to Canada in 1959, he worked as mechanic and ski instructor at BC's Hollyburn Mountain. Three years later, he moved to Montreal and became a representative of the Swiss based company *G. Mueller Engineering*. In 1965, Ernst settled down in Vernon BC where he became a co-owner of *Mueller Lifts Ltd.* in western Canada. His company installed over 60 ski lifts, chairlifts and gondolas in major ski resorts such as Whistler BC and Lake Louise AB. After working for more than 30 years in lift installation, Ernst then concentrated on remote controlled avalanche control systems. Ernst recalled that one of his biggest challenges in his 47-year career in the ski and avalanche industry was the 1965 installation of Whistler Mountain's long lift systems—without the use of today's heavy lift helicopters.<sup>1</sup>





Karl Ernst (middle) with representatives from the original supplier of the 1965 gondolas (CWA, Switzerland) during the Peak 2 Peak inauguration in 2008. Photograph courtesy of Karl Ernst.

Fred Bosinger originally came to Canada to work as ski lift installer for the Swiss company *Mueller Lifts Ltd.* in St. Adele QC. In 1982, Bosinger began to work for Sunshine Village Ski Resort, where, in 1990, he was appointed General Manager/Vice President Operations. Bosinger was the 2004 recipient of the Jim Marshall Award, which acknowledged his meaningful contribution to the sport of recreational skiing.<sup>2</sup>

## GARAVENTA AND THE GROUSE MOUNTAIN SUPER SKYRIDE

Swiss-based company *Garaventa* also had a great impact on ski lift construction in western Canada. In 1976, *Garaventa* built the Super Skyride gondola at Grouse Mountain. With its capacity to carry 100 passengers, the gondola is the largest tramway system in North America. The Super Skyride gondola is one of the most used gondolas worldwide, transporting an average of 1.2 million people up the mountain every year.<sup>3</sup>

## THE PEAK 2 PEAK GONDOLA IN WHISTLER BC

Under the supervision of Karl Ernst, *Mueller Lifts Ltd.* of Switzerland installed Whistler's first gondola in 1965. In 2008, history was made again when the Austrian-Swiss company *Doppelmayr-Garaventa* set a record with its construction of the spectacular Whistler / Blackcomb Peak 2 Peak gondola, the world's highest gondola of its kind.

1. I. Spaar, Interview with Karl Ernst, Jan. 2010.
2. I. Spaar, Interview with Fred Bosinger, Dec. 2009.
3. Information courtesy of Grouse Mountain Resorts.



Fred Bosinger, the 2004 recipient of the Jim Marshall Award. Photograph courtesy of Fred Bosinger.

# SKI RESORT PLANNING AND POLICY MAKING



Sunshine Village skier in the 1950s when ski resort development in western Canada began. Photograph courtesy of Monod Sports Ltd.



A busy weekend in Whistler, near Poma lift, 1963. Photograph courtesy of Peter Alder.

## SKI RESORT DEVELOPMENT

The Rocky, Columbia, and Coastal Mountains in western Canada provide a great variety of ski resorts. Most ski resorts only began to develop and expand in the late 1950s and 1960s. Along with the development of the ski industry came the need for a common planning policy and for an improved tenure on Crown Land for ski resorts. One of the people who worked tirelessly on a policy for ski resorts in British Columbia was Swiss Peter Alder.





Mueller red chair lift, Whistler Mountain BC, 1966. Photograph courtesy of Karl Ernst.



L-R: Karl Ernst and Peter Alder in Whistler BC, 2008. Photograph courtesy of Peter Alder.

## PETER ALDER: THE POLICY MAKER

Between the late 1960s and mid 1980s, numerous new ski lifts were built at British Columbia ski resorts such as Silver Star Sports Ltd., Big White Ski Area and Whistler Mountain Ski Corp.—all of which were under Alder's management. In 1968, Alder, together with Earl Pletch (Mt. Seymour BC), formed the *Canada West Ski Areas Association* (CWSSA) that eventually incorporated BC and Alberta sections into a federally chartered organisation. Today, the provincial sections are the unified voice of the ski industry with regards to the ethical conduct of membership, safety, and governmental relations.

Alder was also involved in planning BC's Sun Peaks Ski Resort, where he managed the planning team and worked together with his wife Trudy and partners Al

Raine & Nancy Greene. Today, Alder still works in ski resort planning, having consulted various governments<sup>1</sup> on land use policies.

When asked about his most significant contribution to the development of skiing in western Canada, Alder said his policy making work at the BC government level with Al Raine topped his list. As a result of their efforts, the *British Columbia Commercial Ski Area Policy*, under which most BC ski areas operate today, was created. This policy now serves as model for many other jurisdictions.<sup>2</sup>

1. Switzerland, Austria, Norway, Finland, Russia, Australia, and Japan

2. I. Spaar, Interview with Peter Alder, Jan. 2010.



# THE LEGACY OF THE SWISS GUIDES



Admiring Canada's stunning mountain heritage: Swiss guides Ed Feuz Jr. and Rudolph Aemmer on Victoria Glacier, n.d. Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies NA66-1819.

## THE LEGACY

From today's perspective, it is easy to see the important role that Swiss mountain guides played in Canadian mountaineering history. They brought with them safe mountaineering techniques from the rich climbing tradition of the Alps and laid the foundation for the birth of skiing as a winter pastime in western Canada. While enjoying the mountain scenery with their clients, the guides instilled in them a respect for nature and the mountain environment.

Canadian historian Robert W. Sandford once stated: *"It was the Swiss guides who made manifest the meaning of having so many beautiful mountains".*<sup>1</sup>

To this day, many Swiss people still play an active role in western Canada's mountaineering culture and carry on the legacy of the early Swiss mountain guides.

1. R.W. Sandford, *High Ideals*, 1999, 40.



Ed Feuz Jr., n.d. Photograph courtesy of the Golden & District Museum, Golden BC.



# MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENTS: FACING SERIOUS CHALLENGES



Plenty of ice on Illecillewaet Glacier, Swiss guide in moulin, n.d.  
Photograph courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies  
V653-NA80-1571.

Switzerland and Canada are fortunate to share a precious mountain heritage. Over the years, this mountain heritage has been, and is now more than ever, challenged by the effects of climate change and global warming. Since the Swiss guides first took their guests to the Illecillewaet Glacier in BC's Glacier National Park in 1899, the glacier has receded two kilometres.<sup>2</sup> The Alps are expected to lose up to three quarters of their glaciers in this century.<sup>3</sup>

Today's biggest challenge is to ensure that future generations will be able to enjoy the unique beauty of the mountains and their glaciers.

2. M. Morris (Parks Canada), *Glaciers, Lichens, and the History of the Earth*, 2002, Columbia Mountains Institute of Applied Ecology Revelstoke BC.
3. *Think Swiss Climate Trail* brochure, Embassy of Switzerland Washington, 9, 2008.



Swiss guides resting, n.d. Byron Harmon photograph, courtesy of the Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies V263-NA-0411.



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