

## **The royals are coming**

13.03. – 03.10.2021

## **Tour of the exhibition**

### **Introduction**

Switzerland has no royal tradition of its own. Perhaps that explains the enthusiasm the democracy-driven Swiss feel when it comes to anecdotes about foreign royals. Large crowds and wild cheering during visits by crowned heads at least suggest they are fans. Many royal families have visited Switzerland. Their reasons for doing so and the places they visit are as varied as the individuals themselves. They come here to relax, or have fled and are looking for a suitable place of exile. Others come here on state visits or to meet other powerful people on neutral ground at the WEF in Davos. This exhibition tells the stories of royal visitors to Switzerland, with mementos of their trips.

### **State visit**

Two years before the outbreak of World War 1, Wilhelm II paid a state visit to Switzerland. Hundreds of thousands cheered him in Zurich, eastern Switzerland and Bern, but the Kaiser had a specific objective in mind: he needed an assurance that Switzerland was serious about remaining neutral and that its army would ensure neutrality by military means if necessary. Should Germany and France come to blows, the Kaiser needed to know that the Swiss army would secure his left flank.

### **Manoeuvres for the Kaiser**

Over two days around Kirchberg by Wil, military manoeuvres were staged under commander-in-chief Ulrich Wille. His aim was to demonstrate the Swiss Army's readiness for battle. Besides Kaiser Wilhelm II and his general staff, officers from 20 nations and hundreds of thousands of spectators looked on.

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## **Press reactions to the Kaiser's visit**

Press reactions in German-speaking Switzerland ranged from sympathetic to enthusiastic – except for papers with a working-class readership. Editorials in French-speaking Switzerland were critical too. The *Journal de Genève*, for instance, questioned Germany's military and economic imperialism.

## **Swiss holiday**

In summer 1868, Queen Victoria had four weeks of R&R in Switzerland. To ensure she was undisturbed, she travelled incognito as the 'Countess of Kent'. British diplomats and officials had begun planning the trip fully two years before. From her base in Lucerne, Victoria visited many sights in central Switzerland, such as Tell's Chapel, the Axenstrasse, the peaks of Mythen, Rigi and Pilatus, and the Furka Pass. She read, painted watercolour landscapes and made entries in her diary.

## **Tourism of a new type**

The first Britons seeking adventure tourism arrived in the early 19th century. Between 1830 and 1880, Switzerland vastly expanded its road, railway and hotel infrastructure and journeys became easier. In 1863, Thomas Cook organised his first group tour of Switzerland.

## **Flood of British tourists**

Queen Victoria's visit led to a surge in the number of Britons visiting Switzerland. They followed in her wake, and Switzerland's tourism bosses spotted their chance: among other places, a paddle steamer, squares and hotels in Lucerne and Interlaken were named in the monarch's honour.

## **Mass tourism**

Hotels and inns were built to accommodate tourists as Swiss transport infrastructure grew. Stagecoaches drove on improved roads into the Alps and from the 1820s steamships plied the lakes. From 1850, mainline railways carried tourists to the new mountain trains that opened up the peaks after 1871.

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## Swiss refuge

Hortense de Beauharnais and her son Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte fled to Switzerland in 1815; for different reasons, Empress Elisabeth of Austria did so, too, in the late summer of 1898. Their sojourns here had very different outcomes: the nephew of Napoleon I prepared for a military career and eventually had himself declared French emperor in 1852, but the Austrian empress became the victim of the anarchist Luigi Lucheni in Geneva in September 1898.

## Napoleon as example

After Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, Hortense de Beauharnais fled with her son to Switzerland. From the age of seven, Louis-Napoleon was raised at Arenenberg House above Lake Constance. He hoped to become an artilleryman like his uncle, and attended Thun Military School under the inspired tutelage of Guillaume Henri Dufour.

## Bonaparte homeward bound

On 1 August 1838, France requested the extradition of Louis-Napoleon Bonaparte following his first abortive attempt on the French throne in 1836. Switzerland refused, and France threatened to attack. To avoid war, Bonaparte followed the advice of Guillaume Henri Dufour and left Switzerland.

## The assassination

Empress Sisi was sojourning incognito at Geneva in the late summer of 1898. She nevertheless managed to discover her identity. On leaving the Hotel Beau Rivage on 10 September to board a steamer for Montreux, she was stabbed to death by the anarchist Luigi Lucheni on Quai Mont Blanc.

## Deportation of anarchists

The anarchist Luigi Lucheni stabbed Empress Sisi in Geneva in 1898 – and the event shocked the world. Switzerland came under fire and foreign ministries piled on the pressure: the country was too lenient with anarchists. The Federal Council quickly ensured the deportation of 36 of them.

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## Early media frenzy

It was a fine day in August 1935. The Belgian king and queen were taking the scenic route to Küssnacht am Rigi when a wheel of their car slipped over the edge of the road. The vehicle plunged down the hillside and collided with a tree. Queen Astrid was thrown out and died from a fractured skull. Passers-by hurried to the scene of the accident. A young student had a camera with him and he took six photographs. His images went around the world the very next day.

## Hobby paparazzo

Willy Rogg first offered his pictures of the scene of the accident to the Swiss Photopress agency, but to no avail. As soon as Associated Press in London made him a binding offer, a plane was hired at a cost of CHF 5,000: it marked Swissair's first overnight flight.

## The myth of Astrid

Newspapers around the world reported on the young queen's tragic death. Barely 30, Astrid became an icon – much like Princess Diana later. A chapel commemorating Astrid was inaugurated at the scene of the accident within a year of her demise, and it became a place of pilgrimage for Belgians.

## Royals, royals, royals...

### The fairy-tale king

King Ludwig II of Bavaria came to Switzerland a number of times. His enthusiasm for Friedrich Schiller's play *Wilhelm Tell* prompted him to visit Central Switzerland. Fired by the story of the Rütli Oath and smitten with the environs of Lake Lucerne, he dreamed of building a castle on the Rütli Meadow.

### Hair of a lion

In November 1954, Emperor Haile Selassie I arrived in Switzerland on a state visit. Unobserved, his bodyguard Heinrich Städeli plucked from the monarch's helmet this strand of hair from a lion's mane and hid it away. Twenty years later, the dictator Haile Selassie was deposed in a military coup. 307 Z.

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## **The 'monarchs' of Switzerland**

It is not entirely true that kings are unknown in Switzerland. At least in casual speech, some figures are likened to them: when it comes to the national sport of Alpine wrestling, for instance, the winner of the contest held every three years earns the title of 'king of wrestlers'.