



THE LONDON NAUTICAL SCHOOL

London Nautical School

Skiing Holiday to Switzerland 1954/55

Preamble:

Early in 1952 my father saw some boys in naval uniform on Waterloo Station and asked where they went to school. After further enquiries, I attended an interview with the London Nautical School Headmaster, Mr Fuest, followed later by a written examination, and joined the 13-year-old entrants in class 3U (Mr Usher) in the rather grim confines of the school in Broadwall. I was told that the building had been condemned before the World War 2 and one could believe this as the classrooms were still heated in winter by individual coal fires.

The four watches paraded each morning in the yard before going to assembly in the hall at the top of the building. I was assigned to the 1st Port Watch which was conveniently formed-up nearest to the school entrance steps.



One of the Teachers, Norman Fortune-Fowler who mainly taught Maths, sometimes assisted by the French teacher Mr Bromley, used to organise a Summer holiday, mainly camping, to the South of France (Cost then £21), which I was fortunate to go on in 1953, and also Skiing holidays in Winter. The two-week skiing holiday that I was lucky enough to go on in my last year at the school cost the princely sum of £26 (a lot of money in those days) - and as there was insufficient takers, the numbers were made up by non-school members known to Fortune-Fowler.

The school party included three boys from my form (5M - Mr Miller), Ron Boland, Geoffrey Bennett and David Gifford and there were two younger lads from the second or third forms whose names I forget. Ron Boland later joined the Fleet Air Arm as a Pilot and after serving there for a number of years, he made a second career with British Airways. Geoff Bennett went to sea as a Cadet with Prince Line and David Gifford went to sea with Shell as an Engineering Officer. I went to sea with the Bank Line and stayed with them until I obtained a Master's Certificate, then enjoyed a thirty-year career (mostly as Master) on the cross-channel Ferries until taking early retirement in 1994.



Back to the Ski holiday, at the end of December 1954 we all met up in London and proceeded by train to Newhaven, ferry to Dieppe, train to Paris, where we changed stations and then caught the night train to Switzerland. We were in third (hard) Class and a very uncomfortable night was spent trying to get some sleep and someone even tried to sleep in the luggage rack.

There was a train stop at Dijon and we were surprised in the darkness to see snow there which we ran out of as we approached Lac Lemman.

Shortly after crossing the border into Switzerland, we got off the train at Martigny and, after a short wait, caught the funicular railway train up to our destination, the village of Salvan, looking very picturesque after a fresh fall of snow. Our excellent lodging was at Pension du Luisin, where the host family were very welcoming, and the rooms comfortable and the meals were delicious and almost exotic after the rather plain food then the norm in post war England. For many of us it was our first encounter with a duvet on the bed and a very short one at that for most. If you pulled it up to your neck, your feet were exposed.

We found out that Salvan is at an elevation 912 Meters (almost 3,000 ft) and situated in a bowl between two mountain ranges and quite near to the border with France.

We were issued with wooden Skis without metal edges so that the wooden edges were worn and much more difficult to control. In those days you were also issued with skis much longer than those considered suitable today and the old-fashioned bindings fixing your boots to the skis would probably not be favoured by Health & Safety these days. We had a full time Ski Instructor who had been a member of the recent Swiss Everest Expedition and our first days were spent in Salvan on the nursery area getting the basics right before going up the mountain road to Les Marécottes some 200 meters (600 ft.) higher where the snow was better and there was a ski-lift. From there we could also ride much further up the mountain to Le Creusaz at 1777 m or 5,830 ft where the snow was crisp, deep and perfect for skiing.

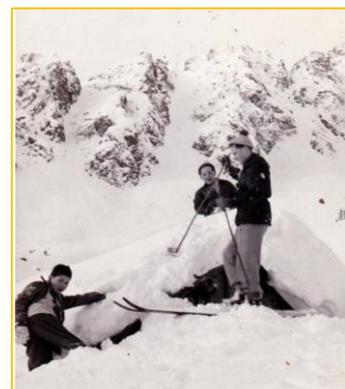


Once our fitness level allowed, we used to borrow sledges in the evening, walk up to the hamlet of Les Marecottes where there was an illuminated ice-rink and sledge back down the snow-covered road in the dark, which although dangerous was great fun.



Also, in the evenings, we frequented an alpine style bar/café called La Mouette where we discovered the pleasures of Gluhwein, a hot spiced concoction of wine and water and just right for the cold weather. Table football was also a great favourite there.

Being young and increasingly fit we all improved our skiing ability, learning to cope with the lack of sharp edges on our skis, so that before the end of our stay we were all able to take and pass the 'examination' for the Swiss Bronze Medal of skiing competency in quite tricky, icy conditions.



The return journey mirrored the outward and we had enjoyed a really wonderful experience. Owing to various constraints, not the least of these being cost, I didn't get to ski again until I was 48 years old, when I went skiing for three years running and found the earlier training to be of great help.

Many of us who enjoyed those holidays owe a great debt to Mr Fortune-Fowler for organising such pleasurable activities.

Robert (Bob) Blowers

29/09/2020

