

Features

Summer ski enthusiasts gather in Switzerland

ST. MORITZ, Switzerland — To diehard skiers, summer is a joyless season that occupies the time between trips to the nearest slope. To many sun worshippers, winter is when tans disappear.

But both sets of enthusiasts come together beginning in June on a Swiss mountaintop nearly two miles above sea level in the Grisons range of the Alps.

On a recent clear, balmy day at the Diavolezza ski area in Pontresina, a T-shirted, blue jean-clad skier cut a lazy turn in the snow, depositing a wake of spray a few feet from a woman who wore shorts and a tanktop to more fully absorb the sun's rays.

Such incongruous scenes are common in the middle of summer at Diavolezza — Italian for "the Devil's region" — a short hop by train from St. Moritz, the chic winter retreat for the

several times a day right at the base of the Diavolezza slope. A cable car journeys to the chalet and ski lift, rising through the cloud line to treat its passengers to a breathtaking panorama of snow-capped peaks and grassy valleys filled with grazing oxen and sheep.

"Skifafers" — the German word for "skiers" — arise early for the trip from St. Moritz to Diavolezza. They have to.

By noon, the ski lift, which opens at 8:30 a.m., grinds to a halt, because the intensity of the sun's rays at 9,827 feet for only a few hours turns the snow into a mushiness consistent with hot oatmeal. The cable car remains open until late afternoon, however, allowing the skiers to shed their equipment and catch some rays before returning home for a sauna and dinner.

By the next day, the glacier's sub-freezing underground temperatures make the slope ready for another day's collection of skiers.

Even with the relatively short summer hours — most winter slopes close down the lifts at 4 or 4:30 p.m. — summer skiing in Switzerland is a unique experience.

The snow at Diavolezza is powdery, free of icy slopes and the hidden rocks and frozen dirt that mar many Northeastern U.S. slopes even at the height of the season.

The summer slope at Diavolezza, running about a half-mile in a straight line, is less challenging to intermediate and advanced skiers than the longer runs on American slopes. But the lack of lift lines more than compensates for this.

Actually, it's better here in the summer for

someone like me," said a silvery-haired, middle-age man who journeyed to St. Moritz while on vacation from his job as a lawyer with the West German Justice Ministry in Munich.

"I'm not one of the best," he said as we went up on the T-bar lift together.

In the winter, he said, the snow "hardens up and you have to be better. There are also big cracks in the ice that throw you off. You lose your balance."

The locals are more accustomed to year-round skiing. Cornelia Perreten, 20, an interior designer from Gstaad and Bern, who has

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been skiing since age 3, said summer skiing is "not for everybody — but great for kids, beginners or for someone who doesn't know the mountains."

As for herself, though, she called it "too boring."

But Diavolezza is one of several slopes in the Grisons that do stay open in the summer. Others are: Corvatsch, which is open from July to October; Stilfserjoch, open from May to November, and Vorab, open from June to November.

Advice offered for summer ski trips to Swiss Alps

ST. MORITZ, Switzerland — Tips based on this reporter's summer ski trip for those who also would ski the Swiss Alps this summer:

—Dress lightly but completely. It's cold enough at night to keep the slope frozen but hot enough during the day to cause sunburn. A thick parka or down vest will be too warm, even if worn over only a T-shirt. The T-shirt is fine only if you coat all exposed areas generously with suntan lotion.

—Bring good, safe skiing sunglasses that allow for adequate ventilation. It's too hot for goggles. Skiing without eye protection in the Alps is like begging for a case of snow blindness.

—Bring boots, skis and poles to the slope. The ski area at Diavolezza has no on-site equipment rentals. Bring your own equipment or rent in a town such as St. Moritz, which has several ski shops.

—Strap on a knapsack or "banana" sack. The mountaintop chalet at Diavolezza lacks the lockers found at most U.S. slopes so it's best to bring something in which to stow belongings — passports, money, snacks. There are lockers at the base lodge but it makes your belongings inaccessible while skiing — or stopping for lunch.

—To savor the spot where the Greek hills go in the winter — at close to half the price this summer — consider staying in St. Moritz, where more variety in hotels and restaurants than Pontresina or other towns near Diavolezza.

—Many of the hotels and dining facilities are open in the winter are closed or under renovation. So it is best to call ahead. Even a scaffolding surrounding some of the buildings, carpenters' saws buzzing away, the place has to be being behind the scenes on a Hollywood set getting ready, in this case, for the yearly appearance of the jet set.

—In St. Moritz, the budget-conscious may want to schedule a dinner at the Engadiner Restaurant where a sign announces, with some justification, "the best cheese fondue in the Engadine valley."

—Traveling to and from the slope, bring a portable Scrabble game or a bag of Diavolezza, the cable car's arrivals and departures are timed to coincide roughly with the ski train line. But trains throughout Switzerland, and especially, it seems, on the one that runs through St. Moritz and Pontresina — are characteristically late.

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Guccis, the Uziellis and the Rossis — as in Martini and Rossi.
A Rhatische line train from St. Moritz stops

Army tests new suede combat boot

Enemy radar detects shine on boot

ABERDEEN, PROVING GROUNDS, Md. — Gung-ho officers and grizzled sergeants accustomed to the Army's spit-polish tradition may have trouble getting used to the suede brush approach of the "brown boot" Army of the '80s.

In a grove of locust trees at this test base, 32 members of today's volunteer force are giving new meaning to the term "foot soldier."

Since mid-May, the 27 men and five women have walked in small circles five days a week, up to 15 miles a day, all to test a new suede-like brown combat boot that never needs shining.

The Army wants to know whether the boot, made with a fiberglass toe and the cowhide leather turned inside out, should replace the standard, black combat boot most American soldiers have worn since about 1959. The Army isn't switching to suede for style, or to avoid the need for a shoe shine. Soldiers, after all, have been spit polishing for nearly as long as armies have used leather.

The Army has determined that an enemy can pick up the shine on the old black boots with infrared detectors used for nighttime surveillance. And there are other factors.

The Army is testing not only for comfort, but for durability under various conditions, for mud retention, for water resistance, for drying time, traction and even for how long it takes to lace them up or to take them off.

So those 32 soldiers keep walking, in rain, heat and humidity. They have been bombarded by black flies, chewed by mosquitoes, attacked by woodticks and surprised by a black snake.

If there's any notion that these pedestrian sacrifices mean marching comfort for generations of soldiers to come, it's obscured by blisters that some have on their toes and heels and itsteps.

Virtually all agree the monotony of the one-sixth of a mile circular obstacle course they must walk every working day until September is the hardest part.

"If the course was longer, it'd be better. But now, I'm just thinking about getting out of the Army," said Sgt. Gerry McElroy, 25, a six-year veteran from Levittown, Pa., who said she joined up to be a tank turret mechanic — not walk in circles.

"If I had a choice, I'd take the brown boot," she said. She found the test boot developed by the Army's Natick Research and Development Laboratory in Massachusetts easier to break in, more flexible and generally more comfortable.

"It's like going from a Volkswagen to a Cadillac — there's that much difference," said Sgt. Lynwood Johnson, 29, an armored personnel carrier driver from Harrisburg, Pa.

"I would say ultimately the (test) boot will be definitely approved," said Doug Swain, the boot project director at Natick, although he said he doubted the first pair will be issued until at least December 1983.

The Army spends \$80 million to \$100 million a year on boots. It buys up to 3 million pair at \$32.50 a set. That price is about to go up to \$37. The new brown boot would cost the Army as much as \$45, Swain said.

"But it should last longer and be more functional and, all things considered, will probably end up in the long haul to be less expensive."

The infantry is testing the boots at Fort Benning, Ga. Marine re-

cruits are marching in them in San Diego. They are getting cold weather wear in Alaska, and desert wear in California.

At Aberdeen, the test group wears the standard black boot half the time, the brown boot the rest.

Each lap of the course is supposed to be equivalent to a mile walked in combat. The troops march up inclines and down, on sidewalks tilted to the left or to the right, up short flights of stairs from which they jump into sandtraps or onto rocks.

They walk through mud holes and gravel pits and on concrete sidewalks imbedded with sharply

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pointed stones. They walk through ankle-bending chunks of bricks and sometimes through water.

They started with 40 to 50 laps a day and were up to an average of 77 by mid-June. The goal is 90.

Most of the soldiers try the summer heat by staying after daybreak and finishing lunchtime. To pass the time, the woman carries a radio. The men walk together, discussing anything from current news whether a couple they should have children.

"Lots of guys like to be around, but I like to take a walk with people and just them," said Johnson, who found the walking "best busy work and a good weight."

The oldest walker is 62-old Mary Kinard, a heavy-duty driver from Benton, Ark.

Sgt. McElroy said the boots caused blisters at first, but he said brown boots bend easier to have a better "grip," but the test boot's so-called "speed" system probably takes longer to take a third the time to break in the black boots do to get used to seem to soak up rain a little faster.

Swain predicted some old-timers will have difficulty justing to a boot their feet longer have to shine.

"There will be an initial tag, probably large red blisters," Swain said, "but this boot as the polish wears the water resistant characteristics."

The test group has been going long enough to promote the troops to quietly promote give you \$20 to break my

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