



DAVOS – THE PIONEER OF WINTER SPORTS IN THE ALPS

The Davos guests were looking for variety and entertainment in the everyday life of this up-and-coming health resort. They discovered winter sports as a healthy activity during their stay. More than 150 years ago, they were the pioneers of winter sports in Switzerland. After 1900, Davos became a sports resort independent of the health resort.

The onset of winter tourism in Davos is known to the day. On 8 February 1865 a sleigh with two German gentlemen arrived in front of the Davos town hall. Hugo Richter and his doctor and friend Dr. Friedrich Unger, who were both suffering from tuberculosis, placed their last hopes on the healing effects of the Davos mountain air. The then 24-year-old Richter was so weak that he was unable to make his way from Rathausplatz to the Hotel Strela – about 7 minutes by foot. He had to be driven up by horse-drawn sleigh. Soon, to the amazement of the locals, they started a cure on a hay sled covered with boards. It proved successful after only a short time and both of them felt able to work again. The same winter locals observed them ice-skating on Lake Davos.

Social Life on Ice

This was the beginning of the winter sports development in Davos. Like Unger and Richter, the winter health cure guests had been indulging in ice skating on frozen Lake Davos since the mid 1860s. The relatively long distance to the health centre and the fact that careless ice-skaters broke into the lake caused Willem Jan Holsboer, hotelier and later initiator of the Rhaetian Railway, to build an artificial ice rink in the garden of the Kurhaus (today Arkadenplatz) in 1866. Other, smaller ice fields were established. After British guests mocked an ice field established by the Landwasser River as a «puddle», the Kurverein opened a 6,500 m² ice rink on the site of today's sports centre in winter 1880/81. On its northern side, a simple pavilion for spectators and a restaurant were built. The ice rink became a centre of social life in Davos. On 22 January 1881, the Davoser Blätter reported: «The life of the health resort society is currently concentrated on the ice rink... All the nations of Europe are making their rendezvous within the narrow framework of the rink; even America and India are represented there...» The ice rink was continuously expanded. After the First World War it had reached an overall surface area of 27,500 m² and was divided into three sections: the large ice rink, an open ice hockey stadium and the English Ice.

Mecca of Ice Sports

On 6 February 1891, 700 spectators witnessed the first international ice skating competition. Overall winner was Davos-based Hermann Günther, who won a box of Bordeaux wine in addition to the cash prize of 160 francs. There is no record of what the 15-year-old did with the natural prize. The following ice skating competitions were organised by the Davos International Ice Skating Club (ISCD), founded in 1893. Davos developed into an international ice sports centre: between 1899 and 1925, nine ice skating World Championships and ten European Championships took place on the ice rink. Until 1930 all world records in speed skating were achieved in Davos. Davos remained the mecca of speed skating and figure skating until the 1970s. A total of around 50 European and World Championships were held. After the cancellation of the 1977 World Speed Skating Championships, no more international championships took place in Davos. In 1998, the last speed skating world cup race was held on the natural ice rink. Finally, the 1,800 m² large natural ice rink fell victim to global warming. The operating days shrunk from an average of 100 at the beginning of the 20th century to

less than 60 at the beginning of the 21st century. In winter 2015/16, a negative record of 16 operating days was recorded. In December 2016, instead of the natural ice rink, the «Ice Dream Davos» discovery park was opened, Switzerland's largest mobile artificial ice rink boasting 4,500 m² of ice surface.

Scots were the first Curlers

Guests had already played curling in Davos around 1872. The first official season took place in the winter of 1888. The Belvédère Curling Club was founded in 1892 and consisted exclusively of guests. Among the founding members were Sherlock Holmes creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and sledge pioneer John Addington Symonds. Two years later, the CC Belvédère Davos and CC St. Moritz became the first Swiss clubs to be accepted into the renowned Royal Caledonian Curling Club in Edington. Until the middle of the 20th century, curling players in Davos were almost exclusively British, especially Scotsmen. How it should be played was not always unanimous. At the end of January 1905, an English health resort guest made fun of the Scotsmen and their behaviour on the ice in a letter to the «Davos Courier». He even called for the founding of an «English Curling Club» in Davos to show what curling would mean «in the English style». He said the Scots didn't understand their own game. The first local club was founded in 1931 and today's Curling Club Davos (CCD) has been in existence since 1942.

Ice Hockey Stronghold

For the first time in Switzerland, Bandy – a precursor of ice hockey – was played in Davos around 1880. The first official season took place in 1890/91. The first European Championships of this sport were organised on the Davos ice rink in 1913 and after the First World War, ice hockey replaced «football on ice».

The first Davos Ice Hockey Club was founded in 1918 on the initiative of Dr. Kurt Wüest as a student and guest club. Today's Hockey Club Davos (HCD) was founded in 1921 on the initiative of dentist Dr. Paul Müller. Since then, the HCD has won a total of 31 Swiss Championship titles. In 1923, Dr. Carl Spengler – son of health resort founder Alexander Spengler – donated a trophy cup to support the HCD and as a peace project for post-war Europe. Thus, one of the most renowned ice hockey club tournaments, the Spengler Cup, was born. The HCD won the Cup 15 times, Team Canada 14 times. Today the tournament enjoys great international recognition – also in Canada, the home country of ice hockey.



THE WORLD'S FIRST SLEDGE RACES

Sledging was the only sport practiced by locals at an early age, but only as a leisure activity. In 1883, English writer and cultural historian John Addington Symonds, together with other guests, launched the world's first international sledge race from Davos Wolfgang to Klosters, which was repeated annually as a «Symonds-Shield». The competition took place on sledges constructed in Davos. The Davos sledge is still appreciated and used worldwide. In 1900 the sledge run from Schatzalp to Davos Platz was built. A second run was built in 1907 from Schatzalp to Davos Dorf. The Bobsleigh races held there developed into bobsleigh sports, which was introduced in Switzerland in Davos. In 1888, the American L.P. Child won the «Symond-Shield» in a lying position and head first. This event is considered the birth moment of skeleton. Until the First World War, up to nine different sledge races were held in Davos.

In 1954 Davos hosted the European Luge Championships. The legendary HCD striker Bibi Torriani was runner-up at the 1957 World Championships in Davos. Even though there are no more races in Davos today, sledging has gained importance as a popular sport. Since the anniversary year 2015, local carpenter Ardüser reintroduced the local production of the original Davos sledge by hand.

Sledging as a traditional Popular Sport

Sledging, like ice skating, served to meet and enjoy oneself as a health cure society. When more and more British people came to Davos in 1876 and 1877, the actual development of sledging and its popularity began. The guests had used every small hill for sledging. Breakneck rides led to accidents and complaints. For this reason, the Kurverein built a first sledge run underneath the Kurhaus (today Hotel Europe) in the winter of 1879/80. Nevertheless, there were always guests who sledged through the streets. After minor accidents, it was forbidden by law to enjoy sledging on public roads. However, not all guests adhered to this rule and accepted the 2.10 CHF fine. The trip on the Poststrasse from Davos to Klosters and the return ride by post bus were popular. The author of «Treasure Island», Louis Stevenson, spent the two seasons 1880/1881 and 1881/82 in Davos. He describes his nightly sledge trip from Davos to Klosters «under shining stars» and at a – felt – frosty temperature of – 400 as a new inspiring experience.

So-called tailing parties were also popular. Several small sledges were tied together and pulled through the snowy landscape by a horse-drawn carriage. The highlight and at the same time conclusion was a racy descent over alpine paths. The return of the racing sledge riders from their missions was also celebrated. They had themselves brought home by large horse-drawn sleighs and attached their sledges, or let themselves be drawn in tailing style.



THE BEGINNINGS ON SKIS

Health resort founder Dr. Alexander Spengler was presumably the first to own a pair of skis in Davos in the 1870s. It was Lappish hunting skis that a health resort guest had brought to him. His son Carl did a few rounds on these sports equipment, unknown in Davos, in the slightly sloping garden of his parents' house. He did not like the sport and the skis were displayed in the shop window of a Davos shop. Together with the simultaneously experimenting Konrad Wilds in Mitlödi, Spengler was the first skier in the Alps.

At Christmas 1883, 10-year-old Wilhelm Paulke received a few telemark skis from Norway from his father. The later geologist, snow researcher and father of German Ski Sports together with his fellow students of the Fridericianum – the foreign high school in Davos – skied on Bolgen. The new sports equipment quickly aroused great enthusiasm and the Davos wagon-makers produced further models based on the model of the Norwegian skis. In 1885, the still existing Davos-based company Heierling produced the first shoes based on the model of the Norwegian Lauper shoes.

A Legend is born

Local brothers Tobias and Johann Branger started teaching themselves how to ski in 1889. They practiced in seclusion and sometimes only after dark to escape the mockery of their fellow villagers. Already in 1890 they ventured on a tour of the Strelaalp and in 1893 they made their way from Davos via the Maienfeld Furka to Arosa and back. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle accompanied them on this tour in 1894. He described his experience in a humorous, self-deprecating report in the Alpine Journal. Among other things, it was said there that his tailor could go marvel at «samples» of his trousers, which were made of «Harris cloth» and thus considered indestructible, all along the way. The report caused a huge response in England. This was one of the cornerstones of British enthusiasm for Davos and skiing. In 1895, four English ski tourists tried to repeat the Branger brothers' tour. Their poor local knowledge led them to an ice-cold alpine hut, where they spent an uncomfortable night. The following day, after a long forest descent, they reached the longed-for village, which turned out to be Küblis instead of Arosa. Through this coincidence a legend and myth of the Alps was discovered. The 12 km long downhill run from Parsenn to Küblis is still a highlight and challenge for snow sports fans today.

Early Ski Races

On 14 February 1903, the English Ski Club Davos hosted the first endurance race, which led over 12 kilometres from the Waldhaus through the Mattawald via Clavadel back to Davos. While the 3rd Swiss ski race in 1907 in Davos involved an involuntary downhill ski race with predominantly «stick work» from the Grüenialp, the event five years later was a significant step forward. On 5 January 1913 the ski clubs of Davos and Klosters organised a downhill race over 10 km from Parsenn to Klosters, with a difference in altitude of 1'200m to be overcome. It was one of the first downhill races in the Alps. Since 1972 Davos Nordic has been thrilling featuring World Cup races for top cross-country skiers and still pursues what began in the Mattawald over 110 years ago.

Parsenn Derby – a Race boasting a Long Tradition

The first race from Parsenn to Küblis was held in 1924 under the name Davos Ski-Derby by the two Davos ski clubs, Ski Club Davos and Davos English Ski Club. Later the race was renamed Parsenn-Derby. In the course of the years, the start and finish were changed several times. After the construction of the Parsennbahn, ladies and gentlemen from 1933 started on the Weissfluhgipfel at an altitude of about 2,700 m above sea level. The men's finish was still in Küblis, which is just under 2,000m further down. The distance covered was about 13 kilometres. The ladies finished their race at the Conterser Schwendi. The Parsenn Derby is still held today and is one of Switzerland's oldest public ski races, with celebrity names such as Urs Lehmann, Martina Accola and Christian Ghedina among the winners.

Pacemaker of Mass Ski Tourism

In Davos, for the first time in the history of alpine winter sports, skiers have been transported uphill instead of skiing uphill. The Parsennbahn, built in 1931/32, served almost exclusively for skiers. She became the pacemaker of mass ski tourism. The world-famous Parsenn region was developed into a large skiing area, especially in the middle of the 20th century. At Christmas 1934 the world's first T-bar lift was put into operation at Bolgen. The ski lift has been modernized over the years, but the location is still the same.

The audience has also changed. In the beginning it was skiers and later ski jumpers at Bolgen Schanze, today it is the young freestylers who show off their tricks in the half pipe or on the jumps on Bolgen.



THE DEVELOPMENT OF WINTER SPORTS IN DAVOS

02 February 1865	Dr. Friedrich Unger and Hugo Richter are the first winter guests to arrive in Davos
1869	The first natural ice rink is built in the garden of the Kurhaus (today's Arkadenplatz)
1871	A 500 m ² ice rink is established on the property of Willem Jan Holsboer.
1872	In Davos, curling is played for the first time
1879	The first sledge run in Davos is opened
1880/81	A 6,500 m ² ice rink is being built at the present location at the sports centre.
1880	Birth of skeleton sport
12 February 1883	1st International Sledge Race from Davos to Klosters with timekeeping
24 December 1883	The first pair of telemark skis from Norway arrives in Davos
1885	The Davos company Heierling produces the first ski boot
1888	First certified curling season
17 January 1889	First Bobsleigh race: beginning of bobsleigh sports
1889	The Branger brothers secretly teach themselves how to ski
1890	First ski tour from Davos to the Strelalp by the Branger brothers
1892	Foundation of the Belvédère Curling Club
1892/93	The ice rink is enlarged again and now measures 16,000 m ² ; the first ice rink building with two striking towers is opened.
1893	The Branger brothers undertake a ski tour to Arosa and back.
1894	Sir Arthur Conan Doyle accompanies the Branger brothers on their ski tour to Arosa
1894	Foundation of the Davos International Skating Club (ISCD)
1895	Four English guests discover the Parsenn descent by accident – a legend is born
25 December 1899	The first mountain railway in Graubünden, from Davos to the Schatzalp starts operating
1900	Opening of the sledge run from Schatzalp to Davos Platz
1903	Foundation of the Ski Club Davos
1903	The first endurance race from Waldhaus to Clavadel
1907	Construction of the bobsleigh run from Schatzalp to Davos Dorf
1918	1st Ice Hockey Club Davos founded, a team of guests
1921	Foundation of the Hockey Club Davos – HCD

1923	First Spengler Cup Tournament
1924	First Parsenn Derby
1931	Opening of the 1st section of the Parsennbahn (2nd section follows one year later)
1931	Establishment of the first local curling club, CC Strela
1931	Construction of the second ice rink building, designed by architect Rudolf Gaberel
1934	Opening of the world's first T-bar lift at Bolgen
1942	Foundation of the Swiss Confederation Institute for Snow and Avalanche Research Weissfluhjoch
1942	Foundation of the Davos Curling Club
1954	Opening of the mountain transport system Davos-Ischalp-Brämabüel (today Jakobshorn)
1957	Opening of the Weissfluhjoch-Weissfluhgipfel aerial cableway
1958	Opening of the aerial cableway Ischalp-Jakobshorn
1960	Opening of the artificial ice rink
1965	Construction of the Madrisabahn
1967	Opening of the Pischabahn
1965	Opening of the Davos indoor swimming pool (today Eau-là-là)
1969	Construction and opening of the Rinerhorn lifts
1971	Establishment of the first official cross-country skiing trails
1974	First race of the Davos International Cross-Country Skiing Days
1973	Cross-country skiing centre opened on Matta (Davos Square)
1980	First official World Cup cross-country ski race within the framework of the international cross-country skiing days
1981	Official opening of the ice stadium (today Vaillant Arena)
1991	Fire at the ice rink premises, arson
1996	Opening of the new sports centre, designed by architect duo Annette Gigon and Mike Guyer
1997	Opening of the Swiss Sports Gymnasium Davos (SSGD)
2005	New north tribune in the ice stadium is built
2008	First snowfarming project: a cross-country ski run is established in the Flüela Valley from previous winter's snow
2009	Reconstruction and new use of the sports centre as a tourist and sports centre in Davos
2015/16	Last winter season on the 1,800 m ² natural ice rink Davos
2016	Opening of the new Davos Cross-Country Ski Centre
2016	Opening of the «Ice Dream Davos» discovery park
24 September 2017	A loan of CHF 25.55 million for the renovation and expansion of the ice stadium is approved by the Davos electorate with more than 84% votes in favour. The stadium will be converted in stages until 2020 and will be available for the HCD anniversary year in 2021.

Destination Davos Klosters

Davos Klosters is one of the most famous holiday resorts in the world and boasts the most comprehensive holiday, sports and meeting facilities in the mountains. Although the contrast between urban Davos and idyllic Klosters could not be greater, both villages, which lie only ten minutes drive from each other, have one thing in common: their fascinating and breathtaking mountain backdrop.

www.davos.ch | www.klosters.ch

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