

This snowy and pleasant land

Discovered by British skiers nearly a century ago, the lofty Swiss resort of Mürren is still their home away from home, as Adam Ruck reveals



The Ladies' Ski Club, founded in Mürren, Switzerland, and pictured on the slopes in 1939, is celebrating its centenary this month

I WOULD like my daughter to dance at the Palace,' remarked King Albert of Belgium when he brought the Queen and Princess Marie José to Mürren for a skiing holiday in January 1929. 'But this may be against the rules, because she did not attend an English public school.'

Perched on a cliff edge opposite the crowning peaks of the Bernese Oberland, pre-war Mürren was an unofficial British colony in the Swiss Alps, thanks to Sir Henry Lunn, who reserved its hotels for members of his socially exclusive holiday company, the Public Schools Alpine Sports Club. The Swiss used to joke that you needed a British passport to board the train at Lauterbrunnen.

Lunn laid on ice rinks and fancy-dress balls for clients, as his son Arnold organised ski instruction,

tests and races for a winter sport in its infancy: downhill skiing. A tireless clubman, Arnold Lunn founded Mürren's British ski racing club, the Kandahar, and made his wife start the Ladies' Ski Club, which celebrates its centenary this month. When Lunn staged a World Championship at Mürren in 1931, alpine skiing's first world champion was 17-year-old Muffie MacKinnon of the Ladies' Ski Club.

On a January morning in 1928, four intrepid ladies joined a group of 17 British adventurers on a four-hour hike to the summit of the Schilthorn (9,744ft), Mürren's home mountain. After eating their sandwiches, they raced each other down to the valley in a downhill marathon they called the Inferno.

Ski racing soon outgrew Mürren and the British and the post-war ski boom left the village behind.

'The Inferno has put Mürren on every skier's must-do list'

Revival took the form of a cable-car and revolving restaurant on the summit of the Schilthorn, perfectly timed to provide a spectacular ski location for the film version of Ian Fleming's *On Her Majesty's Secret Service* (1969). The Schilthorn lift gave Mürren big skiing for the modern age and opened up the Inferno to a wider public. The transformation of the race into a mass-participation downhill and a festival of amateur racing has put Mürren on every keen skier's must-do list. Every

January, sporty celebrities join the throng of retired champions, club racers and reckless recreationalists for the world's longest downhill race—nine miles, when snow conditions permit.

Mürren is no longer a British enclave, but the villagers remember their debt to the pioneers and welcome their descendants. Lunn and other loyal families return year after year, handing the skiing habit down the generations in their alpine home: a small resort with real skiing and a proud history, not to mention a balcony view of the Eiger. 🐾

Visit www.murren.swiss/en/winter for more information. Inghams offers seven nights at the four-star Hotel Eiger from £1,248 per person, on a half-board basis, including travel (www.ingham.co.uk)