*Hofstetten, 13 April   
Press release for Ballenberg, Swiss Open-Air Museum*

“Who wears the trousers?”

**Swiss wrestling exhibition at the Swiss Open-Air Museum**

**The strongest shorts in Switzerland? Compared to other types of wrestling around the world, the answer to this is Swiss wrestling shorts! They are the principal feature and symbol of Swiss wrestling. The new special exhibition at the Swiss Open-Air Museum recounts Swiss wrestling stories from the past and present using these unique shorts, along with a number of different items, including those from the estate of the two-time Swiss wrestling king, Karl Meli from Winterthur. “Who wears the trousers? Schwingen – the Swiss wrestling tradition” opens its doors to Ballenberg visitors from Sunday, 16 April 2023.**

How much can Swiss wrestling shorts withstand? Why don’t they rip when they’re yanked upwards? And who are the people involved prior to the shorts being donned at a Swiss wrestling competition? The new special exhibition at the Swiss Open-Air Museum is dedicated to these and other fascinating questions regarding the traditional sport of Swiss wrestling. “Who wears the trousers? Schwingen – the Swiss wrestling tradition” will open on Sunday, 16 April 2023. It is an exhibition for both Swiss wrestling enthusiasts and newcomers who are curious to know more about Swiss wrestling, from the shorts to the oak-leaf wreaths. It is primarily based on items from the estate of the two-time Swiss wrestling king, Karl Meli, and his wreath-winning daughter, Irène Bodenmann-Meli. The Swiss Open-Air Museum was gifted this large collection of trophies and other memorabilia from Meli’s long career in 2019. The items were previously exhibited at the private Wrestling Museum in Winterthur.

**Shorts are the focus**

The exhibition does not focus on individual Swiss wrestlers, but on the principal feature and symbol of Swiss wrestling: the shorts. These create links to historical ways of life in Switzerland and to a range of crafts associated with Swiss wrestling festivals: from the jute and leather to the sawdust and the prizes on offer, from the craftspeople involved in making the trophies to the music and festivals, from familiar traditions to various voices from the contemporary Swiss wrestling scene. Right from the start, visitors with little prior knowledge are introduced to the topic of “What is Swiss wrestling?” At the interactive “Yanking upwards” station, everyone can see for themselves what the Swiss wrestling shorts have to withstand. Swiss wrestling fans can relax in the “Swiss wrestling museum lounge”, browse the reproduced editions of old Swiss wrestling magazines, admire the numerous trophies and flick through the photo albums. Craft enthusiasts can follow the development of Swiss wrestling shorts, from delicate flax to the strongest shorts in Switzerland. A festival guide accompanies visitors through the special exhibition: this handy reference document contains in-depth information on selected exhibits, background information on the history of Swiss wrestling and fascinating comparisons with other traditional types of wrestling around the world.

**The largest Swiss wrestling shorts in the world**

But the ultimate highlight awaits visitors as soon as they enter the exhibition space: the largest Swiss wrestling shorts in the world span the threshing floor of the farmhouse from Ostermundigen. Measuring around 1.80 to 2.70 metres, several queens and kings could fit into these giant shorts at once. The material was provided by SwissFlax GmbH from Willadingen (BE). SwissFlax has set itself the goal of redeveloping the value chain for Swiss flax and operating this industrially, which also involves producing Swiss wrestling shorts. This unique exhibit was made by one of the saddlers from the Ballenberg saddlery association, who also demonstrate their traditional craft at the Swiss Open-Air Museum on selected dates.

**Cancellation of Ballenberg-Schwinget**

The special exhibition, “Who wears the trousers? Schwingen – the Swiss wrestling tradition”, opens on Sunday, 16 April 2023. Unfortunately, the “Ballenberg-Schwinget”, one of Bern’s first Swiss wrestling festivals of the season, which would have taken place at the same time, must be cancelled due to bad weather conditions. The special exhibition, “Who wears the trousers? Schwingen – the Swiss wrestling tradition”, will initially be open for two seasons (2023, 2024); entry to the exhibition is included in the Swiss Open-Air Museum ticket price.

**Who wears the trousers?**

**Schwingen – the Swiss wrestling tradition**

Exhibition management Swiss Open-Air Museum, Mirjam Koring & team

Design and production management melt GmbH

The special exhibition is supported by

Vontobel-Stiftung

Gebauer Stiftung

Susann Häusler Stiftung

The Swiss Open-Air Museum is supported by

Federal Office of Culture, Canton of Bern

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