

As most readers will be aware the „Swiss club“ celebrates its Centenary this year and many British Bernese owners are planning to travel out to join them for the celebratory week-end in Burgdorf.

**Margret Bärtschi**, a longstanding stalwart of the Swiss club and a friend of many British Bernese owners, is writing a history of the club and breed which she plans to publish, in German and hopefully English, in time for the celebrations.

We are very grateful to Mrs Baertschi and extremely privileged to have an exclusive extract from this review to publish here. Margret's article is produced following her extensive research revealing previously unpublished facts about the origins of the breed as well as the Swiss club and it includes original photos of the dogs and locations of some of the events mentioned.

## Bernese Mountain Dog Club of Great Britain & Margret Bärtschi, 2006

Giving some idea why Burgdorf was chosen for the location of the centenary celebrations and how the early development of the BMD and the club were linked, the article starts with the first ever standard for "Dürnbach Dogs" published in 1908 in the Swiss Kennel Club (SCS) journal.

## How It All Began

### Centenary of the Swiss Club for Bernese Mountain Dogs, established 15th November 1907, in Burgdorf (Berne)

Publication appeared in No.12, March 20, 1908, of the "*Centralblatt für Jagd- und Hundeliebhaber*", the official weekly journal of the "Schweizerische Kynologische Gesellschaft (SKG)" and its affiliated societies.

#### Dürnbachclub

In November of last year, the Swiss Dürnbachclub was established in Burgdorf (Berne), which intends to promote breeding and spreading pure-bred Dürnbach-dogs.

The entry fees are Fr.5.-, The yearly payment is Fr. 10.- The chair is taken by Mr. G. Mummenthaler, the secretary is Mr. Emil Heiniger, both from Burgdorf. The club keeps its own studbook (D.H.S.B). Right after its foundation the Club published the points for Dürnbach-dogs, which are as follows:

**Size:** Dogs 60 – 70 cm, bitches 55 – 65 cm.

**Head:** Oval with slight stop and lengthy muzzle. Flews only slightly developed, crown slightly rounded, eyes brown and full of fire, ears short and triangular, covered with curly hair.

**Body:** rather sturdy than long, with a well arched chest and a strong ribcage.

Legs: **straight and bony, with well developed, stringy hocks, paws round and compact.**

Tail: **bushy and wavy, not carried over the back.**

Coat: **thick and long, over the back sometimes curly.**

Colour: **glossy black coat, rich reddish-brown markings on legs and cheeks and characteristic reddish-brown dots above the eyes. Front part of muzzle mostly white, also the feet. White patch on neck, white star on chests, white collar, white blaze and white tip of tail not a condition.**

Facial expression : **friendly and intelligent.**

As faults are considered: **split nose, hare feet, plump and heavy head, long and slender trunk, Tail bent forward over the back, heavy houndlike ears, eyes too light (like bird of prey, undershot bite.**

As we were told, the Club already has 17 keen and active members. They hope to enter 20-30 Dürnbachdogs at the coming Langenthal Anniversary-Show. We welcome the new society and wish a lot of success. The new club will certainly join the Swiss Cynological Society (SCS) soon.

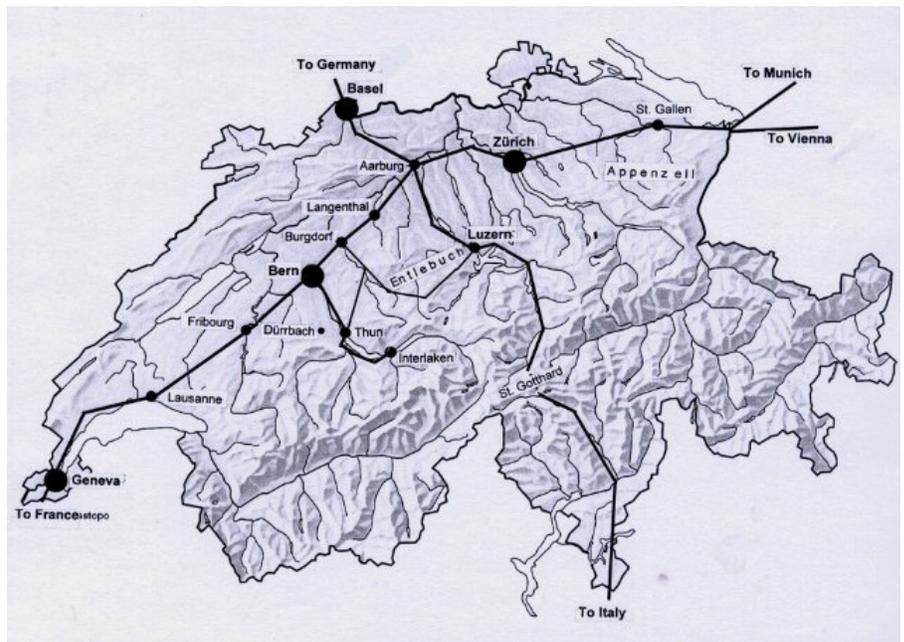
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### The Swiss Cynological Society

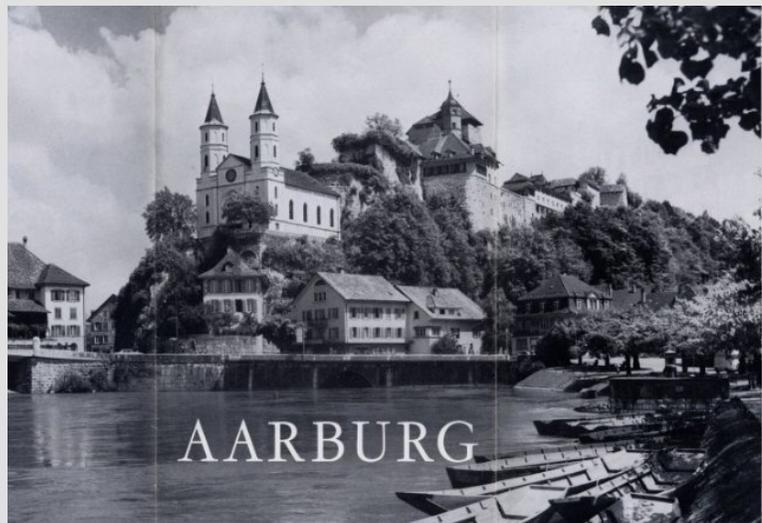
(SCS) = *Schweizerische Kynologische Gesellschaft* (SKG) (Kynologie = science of the dog, from the Greek word Cynos = dog), was 25 years old when this announcement appeared. It consisted of about 850 members, who were organised in 19 local all breed clubs and lately also a few speciality-clubs for single breeds like Saint-Bernards, Boxers, Great Danes, Pinschers, Swiss Hounds, Airedales, Newfoundland and lately also German Shepherds and Appenzellers. Local all-breed sections existed in cities like Zurich, Basel, Lucerne, Davos, near Lausanne and, since 1899, in Berne. The aforementioned Langenthal Dog show of 1908 was planned to celebrate the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the SCS.

### The Swiss Cynological Society (SCS) = the Swiss "Kennel Club"

It all begun in 1883, the year when one of the big achievements of the 19th century was completed: the railway-line which connected the north of Europe with the south: The St. Gotthard-line with its famous tunnel through the Alps. Other railway-lines had been built before and connected Switzerland with Germany, other northern countries and Great Britain. Importing of all kinds of new goods had become quick and easy. Dog fanciers became aware of the existence of more "noble" breeds than the numerous mutts and no-breed-dogs they met at home. In 1882, some keen men of the tiny city of Aarburg set up a cooperation, in order to buy and to sell some of these noble breeds from abroad. They organised a big dog show which was held from May 14 to May 18 1882 in the old castle of Aarburg.



Key locations in Switzerland



The Castle at Aarburg, where the first dog show was held in Switzerland.

Three judges had been engaged who generously distributed awards, which of course raised the selling-prices for the decorated dogs. About 280 dogs were shown. There were big classes of St.-Bernards, but also numerous "ladies-dogs" (toy-dogs), Swiss and German hounds and a great number of dogs that did not belong to any breed, but whose "inner merits" were praised. The show was a success and a pretty good business.

But the more important result of this dog event was the fact, that some important dog-fanciers and dog breeders living all over Switzerland, had met and decided to cooperate in order to promote pure breeding of dogs on a more common basis. They decided to meet again the following year at a similar dog show to be held in Zurich. The show started with 359 dogs and on the day of its opening, June 8, 1883, some 27 men met and established the "Schweizerische Kynologische Gesellschaft (SKG)" = the Swiss Cynological Society (SCS) with the purpose of: „Rearing and caring for our oldest and most noble domestic animal, the dog“.

Many important reforms and innovations have been created by the SCS within the first 25 years of its existence. 16 International and 3 National dog-shows in different cities had been arranged. Dogs were given a voice in front of the authorities. Knowledge of the characteristics and qualities, the powers and faculties and of the anatomy and inheritance of different breeds were widely made known. Written standards were established for groups of dogs that looked alike and served the same purpose: breeds were created. Most important for the SCS was the wording of a generally accepted standard of the "Swiss National dog" of this time, the Saint Bernard. Written Standards were also created for the four varieties of Swiss Hounds. For many years, some members of the managing board of the SCS, such as Prof. Albert Heim, Professor of Geology from Zurich, or the secretary Max Siber, a lover and specialist in hunting dogs, tried to draw interest to the Swiss cattle dogs. First of all to the "Appenzeller Sennenhund", a middle-sized, very quick and clever assistant of the farmers and alpine herdsmen in the eastern part of Switzerland, mainly the Canton of Appenzell. But they were not very successful. Not before 1906 did they succeed: A breed Club for "Appenzeller Sennenhunde" was founded and a standard and a Stud book established.

One other important achievement of the SCS was the creation of a Swiss studbook in 1884, the "Schweizerisches Hunde-Stammbuch"(SHSB), where all the important dogs could be registered. During the first twenty years, only dogs which had been shown and had won prizes at dog-shows were listed. As registering dogs was not compulsory, many famous dogs are missing. From the beginning of the 20th century the management of dog-shows was obliged to report all dogs which had been awarded a prize or a qualification. Therefore, more dogs were recorded. Pedigrees were not yet common and rather an exception. Until the First World War, all dogs which looked like a specific breed were accepted at dog shows and consequently also registered in the SHSB. It was the responsibility of the judge to decide, which breed it was or if it was no breed at all. After the first World War, breeders started to register the litters of their pure-bred dogs, but still dogs which were qualified in shows as "from the breed" with unknown parentage could be registered. Not before 1930 was this stopped and only offspring of registered parents were accepted. But there still were exceptions. The last Bernese with unknown parentage was registered in 1935.

#### **Dogbreeders and dog fanciers in the Canton of Berne**

It took a bit longer for the new ideas about dogs and dog-breeding to become popular in Berne and the surrounding countryside. In 1889, some of the rare breeders of purebred dogs (Saint Bernards, Newfoundlands, Dachshounds, Hunting dogs, Setters, Collies and others) united to an all-breed-society, the "Berna". Assisted by the SCS (based in Zurich), they organised a big International Dog Show in Berne which ended in a financial disaster, so that all the members of the young society had to contribute their share. This was the end of the "Berna" and for the next 10 years nothing with regard to dog breeding or showing happened any more in the Bernese countryside.

By the end of 1898, some of the breeders living in different places of the Canton of Berne met again and decided to take a second effort. In 1899 the dog-society "Berna" was established again. Amongst the initiators were Gottfried Mumenthaler, a newfoundland-breeder from Burgdorf, Fritz Probst an innkeeper and hunting man living in the City of Berne, breeding huntingdogs, Prof. Theophil Studer, Zoologist at the University of Berne who had excavated skulls and skeletons of neolithic dogs, Jakob Deppeler, a photographer and fancier of Swiss dogs and Adolf Tagmann, editor of a local paper called "Tierbörse" (= Animal market) for owners and breeders of small animals like poultry, birds, rabbits and dogs and for enthusiasts of hunting and fishing.

This time the "Berna-Dog-Club" decided to move forward more carefully. So, after a small dog-show held just for the Canton of Berne in 1901, they organised a greater Dog show in May 1902 on a National level. An innovation was announced: There would be a trial-class for "non classified breeds: cattle dogs (Dürrbächler) and Leonbergers". 320 dogs were entered amongst which 4 Dürrbächler-Treibhunde (cattle-dogs) could be noticed.

The four males, all from the outskirts of Berne, were judged by Fritz Probst. Three of them *Bläss*, *Prinz* (Linder) and *Prinz* (Schütz) were awarded prizes. What seems to have been of great importance was a highly spirited article of editor Tagmann in his "Tierbörse", in which he claimed after the show: "that this breed was as popular around Berne as the Appenzeller Sennenhunde in Appenzell and that these dogs would be as much worthwhile to be promoted as many strange dog specialities that were presently showing up on dogshows."

It seems that the four men mentioned above (and maybe others too) were the main instigators for the recognition and the promotion of this new breed. We must especially mention Prof. Th. Studer, who had written more than once in his scientific works about neolithic dwellings, that some of the old neolithic dogs must have been of the same size as the farmers dogs in the midlands near Berne.

The Berna-people were confronted with these dogs everywhere: as willing draught dogs in the city of Berne, where they also were called "Küherhunde" (the "Küher" was the milkman who brought the daily milk to every house), they were the cheesary dogs in the villages, the reliable watchdogs on the farms, they drove the cattle to the alpine meadows in the near prealps south of Berne, and they served as cheap horses for poor people from Rüscheegg and Guggisberg, who used to cross the country with heavily loaded carts sell their handmade tools and baskets. Of course they had not yet the striking aspect of a modern purebred Bernese. They were mixed with yellow or blotchy dogs, like Saint Bernards or some were almost black, but most of these big working dogs were of a predominant type and in some parts of the Canton, like the Dürrbach area near Riggisberg, almost all of them were black, tan and white with a thick long coat.

## The big Dogshow in Berne in 1904

Encouraged by the successful National Show in 1902, the Berna people decided to organise a really big International Dog-Show in Berne in 1904. New attractions were announced, such as competitions for police-dogs, war and ambulance-dogs, water-dogs and more. Rittmeister von Stephanitz (Germany) would be there in person to judge the newly created classes and competitions for German shepherd dogs.

A class for "Schweizerische Hirtenhunde" (Swiss Herding dogs) was installed again with Fritz Probst as their judge. Two Appenzeller Sennenhunde appeared and 6 "Dürnbachhunde": The males *Bläss*, *Phylax*, *Prinz*, *Ringgi* and *Barry* and the female *Belline*, all came from the suburbs of Berne, except *Phylax*, who was shown by a young veterinary doctor, Scheidegger, from Kandersteg. It was at this show when the leading people from the SCS who were present in Berne decided, that the Dürnbach dogs were worth being accepted as a real breed. The dogs which had been awarded with prizes: *Ringgi* 1<sup>st</sup>, *Phylax* 2<sup>nd</sup>, *Prinz* 3<sup>rd</sup> and *Belline* became the first "Dürnbach dogs" registered with No.2698 –2701 in the Swiss Studbook (SHSB). The pure breeding of Dürnbach-dogs could begin.

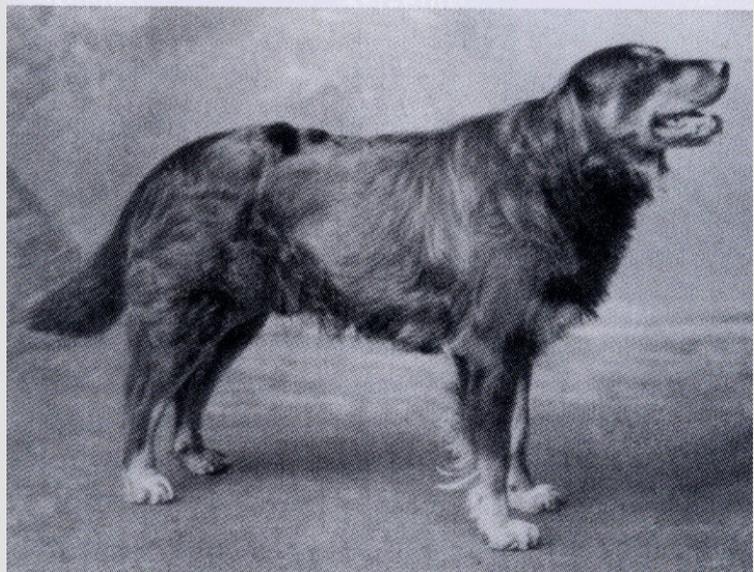
### The gentlemen from Burgdorf

The first men who tackled the new responsibility were a few merchants and factory owners from the nearby city of Burgdorf. They had all owned or bred other breeds of dogs before. The afore mentioned Gottfried Mumenthaler, member of the Berna society, acquired the winning bitch *Belline* soon after the show and by "Tierbörse"-Editor Tagmann he got a male, called *Sultan*. These two are the foundation dogs of the Kennel "zur Gysnau". Factory owner Max Schafroth, acquired a bitch named *Prisca* from Gerzensee, a place near Thun, and with the help of Dr. Scheidegger, the vet from Kandersteg, who had shown *Phylax* in Berne, he got a male called *Bäri*. They were the foundation dogs of the Kennel "von Burgdorf".

When the first litters were born, puppies were acquired by other businessmen in Burgdorf and the Kennels "vom Burigut", "vom Sommerhaus", "vom Schlossgut" and others were started.



**Belline - one of the first "Dürnbachhunde" to be registered**



**Sultan – shown in 1907**

In 1907 Mumenthaler, Schafroth, Ritz, Haldiman and a newcomer, Franz Schertenleib, decided to show some of their animals at the International Dog Show of Lucerne. Prof. Albert Heim, the University Professor from Zurich, had lately been appointed by the SCS to take responsibility for the Swiss cattle dogs (Sennenhunde). He was to be the judge.

Schafroth, took *Prisca*, his foundation-bitch, together with 3 puppies of her litter of 15<sup>th</sup> Nov. 1905: *Prinz*, *Belline* and *Miss* and a younger puppy, the 9 months old *Netty* of *Prisca's* 2<sup>nd</sup> litter. Mumenthaler presented *Sultan*, and Franz Schertenleib showed two males lately acquired in a nearby village: *Nero* and *Bello*. (Marti). These two males were said to be the really true type of "Dürrbächler" Dogs, because they had a split nose! *Prisca* also had a slightly split nose.

Heim carefully examined each dog and listened to their owners and encouraged them to report everything they considered worth telling him about this new breed.

After the show, in No 30 of the "Centralblatt für Jagd- und Hundeliebhaber", the official weekly paper of the SCS, everyone could read the first of a long series of famous judge's reports by Heim on Swiss "Sennenhunde", which have been such a vital contribution to the shaping of the breed.

First, he summoned what he had learned about the purpose and origins of these dogs, then he gave his general impression of the quality of the class, followed by a short and accurate description of every single specimen and as a conclusion a guideline for the breeders about the next steps they should take. Heim judged Bernese from 1907 onwards at every dog-show until late into the twenties and he always published a valuable report after the shows which included every single dog. We know from minutes of club meetings printed in the "Tierbörse", that the club members used to read these reports aloud and discuss their contents at their meetings.

When the "Gentlemen from Burgdorf" returned from Lucerne they had learned that cleft noses were a serious malformation and not a proof of better quality of any dog. The two males *Bello* and *Nero* were registered as Nr. 3473 and Nr 3474 in the Swiss Studbook, but Franz Schertenleib sold them soon after the show and did not use them for breeding.



Old painting of Burgdorf – this chateau overlooks today's showground

From the registrations in the SHSB and from the reports of dog shows, we can conclude, that meeting Prof. Heim in Lucerne had been decisive for this wine-merchant and great lover of any kind of animals, for right afterwards he started his wonderful career as a collector of innumerable good dogs of the "Sennenhunde" breeds.

Four months after the "Gentlemen of Burgdorf" had met Heim, the time had come to take a further important step: they got together and, on 15<sup>th</sup> November 1907, they established the "Schweizerischer Dürrbachclub".

### About Prof. Heim, the "Swiss Cynological Society" and the "Bernese Bears".

If we look back at the article on the formation of the "Dürrbachclub" at the beginning of this chronicle we will notice that it was published four months after the event and that it was written by a member of the editorial staff of the "Centralblatt", not by someone of the new Club. Also had the "Dürrbachclub" had not yet joined the Swiss Cynological Society (SCS)

This is quite characteristic for people living in the Canton of Berne. "Bernese Bears", as they were often called, like their independence and do not readily like to much trust other people's wisdom. Therefore the Club had chosen the local journal "Tierbörse" as their official weekly newspaper, not the "Centralblatt" which was edited at Zurich, a city quite far away. It is unknown when the "Dürrbachclub" joined the SCS. Sometimes this must have happened, but we have no minutes of this event. Also we do not know what happened to the mentioned studbook (Stammbuch) of the Club. It must have become lost.

One other point where the “Bernese people” stuck to their own point of view was the question of the proper name of the Breed. As we see at the beginning of our story, Mr. Heinrich Peter, a man from the SCS, had added the term “Berner Sennenhunde” in brackets, to the name “Dürnbachhunde”, used by the Club. In his report about the Show in Lucerne 1907, Heim used an incorrect spelling and wrote “Dürrenbächlerhund” and had to be corrected by the Club members. So he proposed the change of name into “Berner Sennenhund” instead of Dürnbach dog to the breeders who were at the Show in Langenthal 1908. Heim always thought the Club had done so. But the answer of the Club could soon be read in a publication appeared in “Tierbörse” No 37, 12<sup>th</sup> Sept 1908: “We hope that at further Shows of the SCS our darlings will be named with their proper name. The name, which was decided on by the Club after a long debate is: “Dürnbachhund”, with respect to the place and region, where the breed was preserved cleanest of all. As far as the name is concerned, there is nothing to improve, but as for the breed, there lies ahead many years of hard work until these dogs look the way the breed standard requires.”



**Dürnbach**

It is not stubbornness which made the club stick to its original name of the breed. There are mainly two reasons  
**1]** People who know both breeds will soon realise, that an Appenzeller Sennenhund is quite a different type and character of dog. He and the “Dürnbächler” are not at all the same dogs in a smaller and a bigger variety.  
**2]** Where people from eastern parts use “Senn” and “Sennenhund” for the alpine herdsman and his dog, people in the Canton of Berne speak of the “Küher” (Kuh=Cow) and the “Küherhund”. Therefore “Sennenhund” sounded awry in the ears of the Club members.

The consequence was that for many years both terms were used. In publications of the club, they used “Dürnbachhund” and in publications of the SCS “Berner Sennenhund” was used. In 1912 the Club used “Berner Sennenhund Club” the first time in an official paper. Even today older people living in the Canton of Berne use the term “Dürnbächler” when they see a Bernese Mountain dog.

**Prof. Albert Heim and Adolf Tagmann – two lovers of the breed**

Most historians of the breed have based their information only on the writings of Prof. Heim as their source, especially on his famous booklet “Die Schweizer Sennenhunde” (The Swiss cattle dogs) which he wrote on occasion of the “Schweizerische Landesausstellung” 1914, the “Swiss National Exhibition”. However, if we want to get a more detailed insight into what happened during these first years, we need to read the journals and magazines written by other people as well. A good source for more detailed information are the articles by Adolf Tagmann in the “Tierbörse”. He was living in Berne and familiar with the town and country life in the Canton of Berne, whereas Prof. Heim was an extremely busy University Professor, living in the City of Zürich, who met the dogs mainly at the shows where he judged. From Tagmann’s reports we learn who the founding members of the young club were and we also read more about the occurrence, the use, the aspect and the character of the “Dürnbächler-dogs”. In the summer of 1907 Tagmann even published a book on poultry- and dog-science, in which he gave descriptions of several known breeds, amongst which he depicted the “Berner Sennenhund” with a breed-standard of his own and a list of seven breeders. We learn from Tagmann that Dürnbächler dogs were still very common in the country. It seems that Heim’s statement, that the “Sennenhunde” were almost extinct by the time they were discovered, was overstated. Maybe he was told this by some breeders or it was the impression he got at dog shows where Sennenhunde had appeared so late after numerous foreign breeds had become a fashion.

When, in 1910, the Club put adverts in the local papers, that every person who would present a Dürnbach Dog on April 24<sup>th</sup> in the fields besides the riding hall at Burgdorf, would be awarded with a prize, 107 dogs were presented of which 99 were considered to be true Dürnbächler dogs. About 60 of the dogs and bitches were bred by or in possession of Club Members. About 40 had never been shown before and were shown by newcomers. They were invited to join the Club and even Heim came to the conclusion that the “Berner Sennenhund” was still quite common in the countryside of Burgdorf and Berne.

Heim and Tagmann, both breeders of Newfoundlands, never really co-operated, because they had a serious disagreement on breeding Newfies: Tagmann preferred the huge continental type whereas Heim had imported dogs from their original homeland and pleaded for a more natural and active working dog. In some of Tagmann's articles in the "Tierbörse" he denigrated Heim's beloved Newfoundlands as the "small professor-dogs". Tagmann has done a lot to propagate the Berner Sennenhund in his home-country. He also did an excellent job educating dog owners in rearing puppies, feeding dogs properly or training dogs for certain jobs. Nevertheless we state that the members of the young Dürrbach Club got more and more confidence from the Professor from Zurich. It seems that they had checked with him their first breed-standard before publishing it after the Club had been established, because they fixed the size of the dogs on 60-70 cm for males and 55 to 65 cm for bitches, and not 70 to 72 cm for males and 65 to 70 cm for bitches, as Tagmann had proposed in his book and in some of his articles.

There is an other very important point, which we benefit from, when the "Dürrbach-people" had trusted their tutor Heim more than the prophet in their neighbourhood: For 1908, two dog shows were announced: A Swiss dog show on June 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> in Interlaken and a big International dog show, the Jubilee-Show of the SCS on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> August, in Langenthal. The members of the lately founded Dürrbach-Club were keen to show great numbers of their dogs at both shows, so they entered 22 exhibits, 13 males and 9 females in Interlaken.

Adolf Tagmann was the judge. A new situation had cropped up: some of the dogs had short hair (Stockhaar). So we read in the list of prized dogs: "The shorthair and the long hair varieties were judged in two separate classes." Unfortunately, we are not told which dogs and how many of each variety.

### **One of Heim's greatest decisions**

In Langenthal, where Heim was the judge, the Club expected the same procedure. 21 dogs had been entered. As the club had scheduled, Heim started with the longhair variety and judged 7 males, when Bello, the first shorthair entered the Ring.

At this point happened what was crucial to the breed. In Heim's report we read:  
"The short hair arrives!

No 442, *Bello*, (Owner Schertenleib) is a magnificent old herding-(butchers-) dog of the great, disappearing breed. The dog has 67cm height at withers, is of an enormous constitution and fiery colours... In this class he is an unfitting giant...He does not belong here..."

No 443, *Nero*. ... With his short hair this boy looks too much like an Appenzeller. Bernese should have longer hair!"  
And in his final report he writes: "I think that for the Dürrbach-dogs a long coat should be preferred. It is the rule and a good distinction from the Appenzeller Sennenhund, whereas the short hair should be the rule for the Great Sennener Metzgerhund (herdsman or butchers dog)..."

Both, *Nero* and *Bello* were registered after the show in the Swiss Studbook SHSB, but not as shorthaired "Dürrbächler-Dogs", but as the first "Great Swiss Mountain Dogs". A new breed had been created!

We know from other reports, that within the Club there was a big discussion if short hair dogs should be excluded from the breeding programme or not. Some breeders used short hair dogs as well. But in the end, long hair was the rule.

Heim had, in these first days when the breed club was started, set the Club on the right track: he had excluded the split nose, he had given the breed a reasonable size and he had promoted the longhaired variety.  
By the end of 1908 he could say about the young Club:

"Good breeding material and the right people are now together to promote a very Swiss breed, the Bernese Mountain Dog, in order to increase its rank, to enhance it and to refine it.

Congratulations to the young Club and to all the lovers of this breed and to each one of these spirited and colourful animals."

The original text and images contained in this document were created by **Margret Bärtschi, 3067 Boll, Switzerland**  
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