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### **Taming Sublime Nature: Avalanche Control in late 19th-Century Switzerland**

In the late nineteenth century, Swiss federal and cantonal authorities started a new attempt to control nature, to prevent the “most widespread, magnificent, enormous and at the same time most pernicious occurrence of the Swiss Alps:” avalanches. In 1867, Johann Coaz, the author of this line and cantonal forester of Grisons, oversaw the construction of the first avalanche *Verbauung*, a structure that would prevent avalanches at their origin by stabilizing the snow layer, in Schleins. Soon, foresters from Austria, France, and Italy visited the contraption to construct similar barriers at home. In 1896, Coaz presented a national avalanche map that highlighted zones of avalanche danger at the National Exhibition in Geneva. Based on an analysis of Coaz’s correspondence and reports, this paper shows how Coaz built his expertise of snowy nature at the intersection of military mapping, forestry, and mountaineering in a period during which the modern Swiss nation state was formed. Coaz used his expertise and influence not only to develop new methods of studying avalanches but also to make avalanche management a national priority and firmly establish the importance of scientific expertise in that management. However, Coaz did not fully disenchant avalanches through scientific rationality but carefully maintained their sublime nature as a wondrous phenomenon graspable only by a mix of scientific and experiential knowledge. This paper thus shows how the successful management of natural catastrophes and control of environmental risks depended not only on scientific epistemologies but also on maintaining an aura to galvanize the state into action.