



PRESS RELEASE

60 YEARS OF GRANDE DIXENCE SA COMMISSIONING OF BIEUDRON POWER PLANT

Bieudron power plant the main focus of the festivities

Bieudron, 30 April 2010 – Today, Bieudron power plant is host to the event in celebration of the sixtieth birthday of Grande Dixence SA, the commissioning of the Cleuson-Dixence facilities and the inauguration of the new information pavilion and the visitor trail. With its 1269 MW of installed power, Bieudron power plant enables its two owners – Grande Dixence SA and Alpiq Suisse SA – to optimise the use of the water resource of this top Swiss hydropower scheme. The power plant will be open to the public on Saturday, with many surprises in store.

Close on 200 guests gathered this morning at Bieudron for the festivities organised as part of the sixtieth birthday celebration of Grande Dixence SA and the commissioning of the Bieudron power plant. Well-known figures present included Jean-Michel Cina, Cantonal Councillor for the Valais region in charge of the Department for the Economy, Energy and Regional Development, who spoke of the driving force that electricity represents for the economy of the Canton today and especially in the future.

Grande Dixence SA, 60 years of history

Founded in August 1950 for the purpose of building the present hydropower scheme, Grande Dixence SA is owned by Alpiq Suisse SA, IWB Industrielle Werke Basel, BKW FMB Participations SA and Axpo AG. Standing 285 metres high, the Dix Valley dam, which is the core element of this scheme, is still the tallest gravity dam in the world, even today. With its catchment area of 420 km², 35 glaciers, 80 water intakes and 400 million m³ of reservoir water, the Valais scheme is one of the principal hydropower stations in Switzerland and Europe. It comprises the 4 power plants of Bieudron, Nendaz, Fionnay and Chandoline which have a total capacity of 2069 MW, or the equivalent in renewable energy of two nuclear power plants. For Hans E. Schweickardt, Chairman of the company celebrating this major anniversary, the people who built Grande Dixence were not only hydropower pioneers, they had a real vision of the energy challenges the country would face in the future.

Restoration of the Cleuson-Dixence lined shaft

The restoration work that began in 2005 following the accident in December 2000 involved completely relining the existing pressure shaft and bypassing of the accident zone. All in all, 1,360 curved sections – 12,500 tonnes of steel – were moulded in Linz in Austria, and then carried by rail to Sion. These steel cylinders were then transported by truck and cableway to the various openings along the route of the project where they were inserted into the existing shaft. The restoration called for the active involvement of 600 members of staff 24 hours a day, and cost CHF 365 million. The work finished in August 2009 and was followed by six months of tests. At the same time, the Bieudron power plant was completely overhauled. On 27 January this year, Cleuson-Dixence Construction SA handed over the Cleuson-Dixence facility to its owners, Grande Dixence SA and Alpiq Suisse SA. With Bieudron's 1269 MW of installed power, the Grande Dixence hydropower scheme now has twice as much flexibility as before. For Daniel Mouchet, Chairman of Cleuson-Dixence Construction SA, the commissioning of the plant and equipment means that its owners will be able to respond more quickly to peak energy needs and contribute significantly to the stability of the Swiss electricity grid. In view of the challenges to the country's security of supply, the construction of the 380 kV Chamoson-Chippis line remains essential in the short term.

Inauguration of the information pavilion and visitor trail at the Bieudron site

The Grande Dixence dam attracts some 100,000 walkers every summer, including 10,000 who are enthusiasts or just curious and who follow the visitor trail through the dam wall. Given this popular interest in energy and hydropower, the owners of the scheme decided to build a new information pavilion and a visitor trail down in the plain, on the banks of the River Rhône where the Bieudron and Nendaz power plants are sited. Designed by architects Lorenz et Musso in Sion, the information pavilion is a sober, modern and light-filled space where visitors will get to know the scheme through interactive museographic tables, computer graphics and a 3D film about the journey taken by the water from cloud to dam. Visitors will then be invited to follow the visitor trail through the Nendaz and Bieudron power plants. A film about the history of the scheme, computer graphics and life-size projections of one of the three generating sets of the Bieudron plant, are some of the surprises in store for visitors. The information pavilion and the visitor trail will be open throughout the year by reservation, for groups of a maximum of 60 people.

Open Day, Saturday 1st May 2010

To mark the event, an open day has been arranged for Saturday, 1st May 2010 at Bieudron, from 09h00 to 17h00. Visitors will have an opportunity to discover the new information pavilion and follow the visitor trail through the Nendaz and Bieudron power plants.

Further details about the hydropower scheme and the Open Day can be found at www.grande-dixence.ch.

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Profile of Grande Dixence SA

Founded in 1950, Grande Dixence SA is the leading electrical power supplier in both Switzerland and Europe. The company is based in Sion and owns the Grande Dixence hydropower scheme that collects water from 35 glaciers in the Valais, from the Mattertal (Zermatt area) to the Val d'Hérens. The jewel in the crown of this complex is the Grande Dixence dam, the tallest gravity dam in the world, which collects and stores the water from these glaciers. The output from Grande Dixence SA represents a fifth of Switzerland's storable energy. All the energy generated by the scheme is delivered to the four joint owners of the company's share capital (CHF 300 million) and who supply the consumers in 17 Swiss cantons. The four shareholders are Alpiq Suisse SA (60%), IWB Industrielle Werke Basel (13 1/3%), BKW FMB Participations SA (13 1/3%) and Axpo AG (13 1/3%).

Profile of Cleuson-Dixence Construction SA

Cleuson-Dixence Construction SA (CDC) was formed in October 2003 by Alpiq Suisse SA (formerly Energie Ouest Suisse) and Grande Dixence SA, for the purpose of restoring the Cleuson-Dixence hydropower scheme after the accident in December 2000). Its task was to manage and plan the studies and works involved in bringing the complex (comprising the water intake at the dam, the tunnel, the steel-lined shaft and Bieudron power station) back into service.