

The three Jura Lakes, one of Switzerland's wayside marvels[s.n.]

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The lakes of Bienne, Neuchâtel, and Morat, with their unspoiled surroundings, vineyards, picturesque villages and romantic little towns, have a very special charm. These three lakes can be visited without once having to get off the ship and at the same time one passes from the German into the French speaking part of Switzerland.

THE THREE JURA LAKES, ONE OF SWITZERLAND'S WAYSIDE MARVELS

From our bungalow on the shore of the lake of Bienne, amongst reeds and willows, we started to explore the fascinating region of the three Jura lakes. Very different in size and character, they have the same mild climate in which grapes ripen and laurel trees and bamboo grow. Sunny terraced vineyards stretch way up to the edge of the woods and the rocks and give a southern atmosphere to the country. All along the coast, half-way up the hills, there is a walk from which you have a most beautiful view. On the opposite shore one sees farmhouses and orchards and above the green hills appear the snow-capped summits of the Bernese Alps. Just below we can admire the nacreous lustre and shimmering colours of the idyllic lake of Bienne. Sailing-boats skim over the water and birds of prey slowly draw circles in the blue sky. On the upper part of the lake St. Peter's Island looks somewhat like a big tortoise dozing in the sun. Narrow stone steps take you down the vineyards to quaint inns where fish is prepared deliciously and served with light sparkling wine grown in the country. The native people, mostly wine-growers live in charming old villages and little towns. Cobbled pavements, high narrow houses built in a row, with window boxes blooming, and small romantic harbours are typical of this lake district.

Autumn is the grape-harvest season for the hard-working country population. The days of vintage are celebrated with music and dancing, and crowds of townspeople come out on Sundays to take part in the general merriment and to visit the ancient vaulted cellars with their giant barrels. One seldom sees those typical wine-growers, peasants and fishermen in the big restaurants. You will find them in cosy village pubs discussing amongst themselves, or playing cards round old wooden tables, looking very much like the figures of paintings by the famous Bernese artist, Albert Anker. We know an inn-

keeper who sings and plays the lute, others make drawings and poetry; but their guests will be served select menus at any time. An old peasant who lived in London seventy years ago, still talks English to every stranger he meets. well-known artists and writers have settled down in these spots and weavers and woodcarvers exhibit splendid handmade works of art.

If you are on a business trip, Bienne (Biel) is a good place to take your family to in summer. The city's natural frame is the lake and the Jura mountains. The first thing to do is to have a bird's-eye look at the surroundings from Macolin reached by cable railway. The terrace of the Swiss Federal Sport School affords a splendid view of the distant Alps, the countryside, the lake and the town just below with its modern hotels, watch-factories, the General Motors assembly plant and many other industrial buildings. Bienne is a fast-growing town, open-minded and forward-looking. Two languages and two cultures met here in the thirteenth century and have influenced the development and character of town and inhabitants. Every quarter and every street has a French and a German name and the schools are bilingual. Astonishing is the abrupt change from the lively business centre to the peaceful atmosphere of the old town with its ornamented buildings, pretty old fountains and arcades. On market days peasant women with baskets full of vegetables, flowers and fruit bring life and colour into these quiet parts. Bienne has gained world-fame through the high quality, beauty and precision of watches and chronographs manufactured here. This industry began in the eighteenth century, when local goldsmiths joined forces with the clock manufacturers to turn out one of the most distinguished products of the world: the Swiss Watch. Bienne has elegant shops, the world's politest trolleybus conductors and quite a number of select restaurants and cafés. The lakeside promenades and beaches are beautifully landscaped and ideal for nautical sports.

I don't think anything could be more relaxing than a whole day spent on the water, enjoying sun and fresh air. The three-lake-tour arranged by the Navigation Society of the lake of Bienne is an unforgettable experience. While the ship glides along we have time to contemplate the shore and its handsome scenery. Gradually the Jura hills, with their forests, pastures and rocky ravines, rise to the summit of the Chasseral, from where one has a spectacular view of the Alps from East to West. The road leading up there is very good and open to motor-cars. Our ship approaches St. Peter's Island, after passing some beautiful places with ancient churches, dreamy hamlets half-hidden in the vineyards, a cable railway leading from the lake to

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On St. Peter's Isle where the famous philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau happily settled 200 years ago to find peace and solitude as a refugee, the Rousseau gospel "Back to Nature" has many twentieth century adherents. In summer tourists invade this charming spot with tents and rucksacks; fortunately the island is big enough to hold them all and can also satisfy those in search of quietude. It has large sand beaches, a lush vegetation and lovely woods, as well as open fields and vineyards. Its ancient monastery is now a hotel that has kept its old-world charm. In Rousseau's room nothing has been changed and the peaceful atmosphere he describes in his "Confessions" is still lingering about the place. His marble bust languidly watches the lake from the end of a poplar-shaded path. Through the melioration of the Jura lakes a narrow strip of land has formed and people can now walk from the island to Erlach (Cerlier), a pretty little lakeside town with a castle-crowned hill.

Our ship has passed the Thielle Canal and enters the waters of the lake of Neuchâtel, the largest and most romantic of the three lakes, but first we turn into the Broye Canal, which leads to the smallest and quietest of the lakes and the historic town it is named after: Morat (Murten) has scarcely changed in 600 years! Its towers and bastions are reflected in the clear water of the lake at the foot of Mount Vully. The lake of Neuchâtel looks wide and bright-coloured, with the city of Neuchâtel all built in yellow stone, its large vineyards spread out over the country and the dark Jura range soaring above in the background. Places of historical interest adorn its shores, looking as though they were founded to last an eternity. Neuchâtel is a quiet but sophisticated university town, cherishing its old traditions. Here the best French in Switzerland is spoken. Neuchâtel citizens are well-bred and have refined tastes. Some families still live in lovely old mansions and receive their guests in regal style and splendour. A renowned School of Commerce and many excellent boarding schools cater to young people from all over the world. In the Neuchâtel Jura they manufacture wonderful watches, musical boxes and famous automatons, of which there is a good collection at the local Art Museum. One should also visit the Abbey church, the cloisters of the Castle and the exquisite 18th century Palais Du Peyrou.

Immediately upon leaving the railway station one has a breathtaking view of the Alps. A walk on the "quai" along the shores of the lake is a real pleasure and a nice fish- "friture", or a "fondue" (Creamy cheese speciality, eaten out of a pan with bread squares) with a bottle of

"Neuchâtel", served on the terrace of a lake-restaurant, is something worth being experienced.

M. C. RYHINER.

[S.N.T.O.]

MUCH ADO ABOUT A SMALL MOLLUSC

The Swiss canton of Neuchâtel recently prohibited the taking of snails over the whole of its territory for a period of two years. This measure, which obviously tickled the humorists, was considered in the border regions of France to be directed mainly against French snail pickers, who in fact, unable to find sufficient snails in the French Jura, come to Switzerland in search of their prey. However this general measure has been introduced quite simply in order to protect the species; snails are in fact much sought after owing to the good price they fetch and the continually growing demand for them in restaurants. But it takes three to four years for this gastronomic mollusc to grow big enough for the table. In view therefore of the decline in the number of snails, pickers have a tendency to take them smaller and smaller, before they have had time to reproduce in fact, so that the species is in danger of rapidly dying out; hence the new protective measures.

If such an apparently trivial question nevertheless has a certain interest it is because the snail trade is quite a big one according to Swiss customs statistics. In 1952, for example, imports amounted to 47 tons, and exports to 86 tons; imports have increased but not to the same extent as exports; in 1956, Switzerland imported 100 tons of snails and exported the record figure of 476 tons, which represents almost 20 million snails, since then, the figures have undergone various fluctuations and in 1964 totalled 284 tons for imports and 246 tons for exports. It can be seen therefore that these measures for the protection of snails are fully justified, not only from the point of view of protecting nature but also on the economic level.

[O.S.E.C.]

A GIGANTIC FIREWORKS DISPLAY

Owing to the serious fires that have been caused in recent years by fireworks and fire-crackers, which are used in ever growing quantities nowadays for national holiday celebrations, the biggest chain of toy shops in Switzerland, with branches in all the big towns, decided a short while ago to give up all sale of fireworks. In order to comply with this decision, it recently destroyed the whole of its remaining stocks, worth between 20,000 and 30,000 Swiss francs, except for a few special items which were given to the Zurich fire-brigade for use during fire practice.

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