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Disastrous weather in southern Switzerland



The weather disaster in Brig had devastating consequences.

Weeks of constant rain have resulted in serious damage in many parts of Switzerland. In Ticino large areas of Sopraceneri were flooded and declared disaster zones. The towns of Locarno and Ascona were almost entirely under water after the surface of Lake Maggiore rose to record levels.

But the worst disaster was in the town of Brig in Upper Valais. On the night of September 26-27, the Saltina – normally a quiet stream but suddenly trans-

formed into a raging torrent – overflowed and spread a metre-high layer of earth and mud throughout the town. There were two deaths, and total damage to property is estimated at half a billion Swiss francs. Practically all businesses in Brig were brought to a standstill, and breached oil tanks led to extensive environmental pollution. It will be quite some time before the town returns to normal life.

Holidays for Swiss Abroad children

The Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad is again organising holidays in Switzerland for Swiss Abroad children in order to strengthen their ties with the homeland.

When? July 4–August 20, 1994 (for any three weeks, or any two weeks for ages 7 to 10)

Where? – In a Swiss family
– At a holiday camp organised by the Foundation

Who? Children aged 7 to 15 of Swiss nationality or whose mother was born Swiss.

How much? Participation in costs is based on family circumstances up to a

maximum of Sfr. 40.– per day per child.

Registration: Before March 31, 1994

Ski camp: December 27, 1994 to January 4, 1995 (from age 10); January 2 to 9, 1995 (ages 13 and 14).

Registration: Before September 30, 1994.

Application forms and further information may be obtained from Swiss diplomatic posts or directly from the Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad. The forms must be sent to the diplomatic post at which you are registered.

Foundation for Young Swiss Abroad

Holiday Scheme

Wattstrasse 3, CH-8050 Zürich

Tel. 41-1-313 17 17

Art from distant parts

From May 6–15, 1994, Windisch (Canton Aargau) Cultural Circle is organising an exhibition for Swiss artists who live and work abroad. Those who would like to see their pictures, photographs or sculptures shown in Switzerland and would be able to visit Windisch during this time should apply in writing, enclosing photos of their works, to:

Windisch Cultural Circle
Stephan Haller
Dorfstrasse 29
CH-5417 Untersiggenthal



Personal

● Berne SPS National Councillor Gret Haller (46) has been elected president of the National Council for 1994 and will become Switzerland's highest ranking person.

Zurich FDP representative Ricardo Jagmetti (64) will be president of the Council of States.

● Swiss social scientist Gabriel Fragnière became rector of the Europa Institute in Bruges in September. This offers post-graduate studies in European law, European economics and European political and administrative sciences.



● Art historian David Streiff (48) has been appointed head of the Federal Office for Cultural Affairs. Streiff directed the Locarno Film Festival for ten years, and his last appointment was director of the Swiss Foundation for Photography. He succeeds Alfred Defago, who has been appointed general secretary at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.



● The general secretary of the Rassemblement Jurassien, Roland Béguelin, has died at the age of 72. Béguelin was the most prominent combattant for Canton Jura before its creation and until his death continued urging that the Bernese Jura districts of Moutier, La Neuveville and Courtelary should be added to the new canton.

Texts: René Lenzin
Photos: Keystone

The EEA and the Confederation's 700 years

A degree thesis at the University of Berne asserts that the Confederation's 700th birthday celebrations contributed to the EEA No vote. They apparently strengthened national sentiment and hampered the development of a spirit of openness. In particular, the "Festival of the Confederation" during the August 1 weekend was marked by traditional symbolism and stamped the jubilee year with its pomp and circumstance.

Events pointing in the opposite direction (the Festival of Four Cultures, the Festival of Solidarity, etc.) seem to have had little effect; and this meant that the aims of the government to emphasise new interpretations of independence, neutrality and participation in the future of Europe were pushed into the background. The negative referendum result on December 6, 1992, showed that the Federal Council did not succeed in convincing Swiss voters of the justice of its views on membership of the European Economic Area. ■

Point of View

"On the day when legal action becomes an Olympic sport, Switzerland will win a gold medal".

Federal Councillor Jean-Pascal Delamuraz on the Swiss rush to the courts.

The death of Niklaus Meienberg

On September 24, Swiss historian, journalist and writer Niklaus Meienberg took his own life. This "enfant terrible of condemnation and complaint who shouted and wrote from the rooftops with power and fury" – as Meienberg was described in one obituary – had the Swiss establishment quaking in its boots in the course of his 14 books. Whether describing military justice during the Second World War or the Wille family clan or the death of his much loved mother, Meienberg was attracted to the most sensitive and tricky subjects, which he then analysed and dissected with a keen pen and a brilliant mind. He saw himself as a reporter, but – as another obituary notice pointed out – he made his journalism into literature.

Meienberg was born in 1940 in St.Gall, went to the Disentis Catholic boarding school, studied history at Zurich, Fribourg and Paris and then spent his whole life as a journalist working for a number of newspapers. He first hit the headlines in 1976, when the Zurich 'Tages-Anzeiger' closed its columns to him after a critical report on the Prince of Liechtenstein. In the last years of his life he suffered both physically and mentally as a result of a brutal mugging in Zurich, a motor cycle accident in France and increasing isolation due to

his dogmatic attitude during the Gulf war. This was reflected in the careful preparation with which he arranged his suicide.

A week after Meienberg's death, his latest book, 'Zunder' (Tinder), appeared.

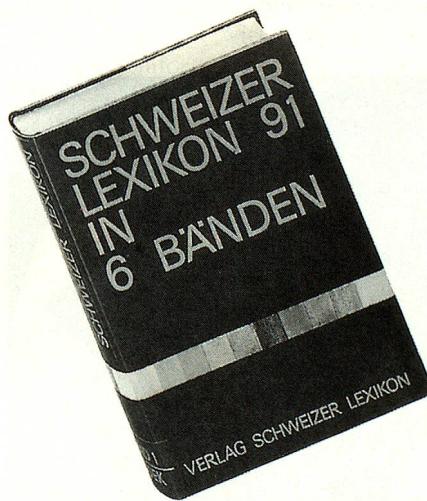


Niklaus Meienberg, master reporter, is dead.

This is a collection of articles which shows yet again that Swiss literature has lost an impressive and powerful figure. ■

Books

Schweizer Lexikon '91 (Swiss Lexicon '91), Verlag Schweizer Lexikon, Mengis und Ziehr, Lucerne 1991–93, 6 vols., 5,083 pages, Sfr. 1,599.– (plus postage). With the appearance of the sixth volume at the end of September the Swiss Lexicon is now complete. Publisher Ferdinand Mengis and editor-in-chief Wilhelm Ziehr have finished their difficult task of compiling a special reference work for Switzerland (70–80% of the total content) combined with a universal lexicon (20–30%). This means in practice that it provides a vast amount of information on purely Swiss subjects which can be found nowhere else. For example, all cantons are portrayed in detail and all towns and villages are presented. Extensive infor-



mation is also given under general headings which are relevant to Switzerland.

About 2,500 authors have contributed to the new lexicon, which is easy to consult and readily comprehensible. The large number of illustrations – mostly in colour – are a pleasure to look at. Any one who wants to get to know Switzer-

land from A right through to Z could do no better than to purchase this book.

Benedikt von Tscharner, **CH-CD, Schweizer Diplomatie heute** (CH-CD, Swiss Diplomacy Today), Schulthess Polygraphischer Verlag Zurich 1993, 116 pages, Sfr. 35.– (plus postage). Top Swiss diplomat Benedikt von Tscharner is not providing a diplomatic manual or a handbook on foreign policy, but rather a series of essays based on his personal experience. Von Tscharner is highly devoted to his profession but nevertheless takes a critical attitude to some aspects of diplomatic life. Many of his reflections – such as his remarks on the art of negotiation and the role of language – have a validity which extends well beyond diplomacy.

These books may be obtained from the Secretariat for the Swiss Abroad, Alpenstrasse 26, CH-3000 Berne 16. ■