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Snippets

Steady. Switzerland's permanent population reached 7,093,500 at the end of 1997. The increase of 12,200 (0.2%) over the preceding year is due to there having been more births than deaths. The percentage of foreigners remains steady at 1,372,000, just under a fifth.

Exemplary. The mountain municipality of Vrin in Grisons has been awarded this year's Wakker prize by Schweizer Heimatschutz, the League for the Preservation of Swiss Scenery. This is intended to honour the exemplary planning in the country village and the direct marketing of agricultural products manufactured in an environmentally friendly way. The Wakker-prize brings with it Sfr. 20,000.-.

Discontinued. Telephone broadcasting was finally discontinued in January this year. Transmitted since 1931, telephone broadcasting was Switzerland's first cable radio. Its high point was at the end of the 1960s when there were half a million subscribers. Thereafter it suffered increasingly from the competition of more modern cable networks.



Silent. The well known Schwyzerör-geli (concertina) player from Muota-thal, Rees Gwerder, has died at the age of 86. He was one of the leading-representatives of traditional Swiss folk music. This master of improvised playing was self-taught, and never learned to read music.

Educated. Matriculation and university diplomas are more and more sought after in Switzerland. Between 1980 and 1996 the number of 19-year olds obtaining their matriculation certificates (Maturität) rose from 11% to 18%. Among 27-year olds, university degrees rose from 5% to 9%. But regional differences are substantial. Figures in the French and Italian-speaking parts of the country particularly are above average. ■



Flight fails – but breaks the record

Bertrand Piccard's attempt to fly round the world in a balloon non-stop has failed. The causes were unfavourable winds at the beginning of the flight, and over-flight approval received too late from China. But Piccard and his companions Wim Verstraeten and Andy Elson have broken two records nonetheless. At 9 days, 17 hours and 55 minutes they made the longest flight ever without fuelling, and the longest flight without touching down. Piccard, son of oceanographer Jacques Piccard, and grandson of ballooning pioneer Auguste Piccard, intends to try once again to fly round the world.

Seven medals for Switzerland

There were seven medals for Switzerland at the 18th winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. Skip Patrick Hürlimann and his curling team took gold, as did the snowboarder Gian Simmen in the half-pipe. Marcel Rohner's four-man bob team and Didier Cuche in the super-G came away with silver. And bronze medals went to Ueli Kestenholz in the snowboard giant slalom, Michael von Grünigen in the "normal" giant slalom and Colette Brand, the ski-acrobat, in jumping.

The Olympics were disappointing for the Swiss women's alpine team which failed to get close to the medals in any of their disciplines. But the Swiss women provided an agreeable surprise in the Nordic disciplines: they came fourth in the relay, missing third place by very few seconds; and Brigitte Albrecht secured a respectable 7th place in the 30 km race. ■

A new trainer – challenging opponents

The Swiss national football team's new trainer is Gilbert Gress. The long-standing Neuchâtel Xamax trainer from Alsace took over from Rolf Fringer after the team under Fringer's leadership failed to qualify for this year's world championship. Gress will continue as Xamax trainer as well until the end of the season. The national team's next objective is to qualify for the European championship to be held in the year 2000 in Holland and Belgium.

After flying high for a while under Roy Hodgson, the Swiss players came to earth with a bump in the course of the world series qualifying games. They took fourth place in a group which can be described only as mediocre. Qualifying for the European championships in 2000 is likely to be very difficult given the strength of the opposition: Italy, Denmark, Wales and Belarus, especially as only the nine group winners and the best runner-up of the nine groups qualify directly. The qualifying games begin in autumn. ■

*Text: René Lenzin
Fotos: Keystone*