

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 38 (2011)
Heft: 3

Buchbesprechung: Schweizer Erinnerungsorte : aus dem Speicher der Swissness
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Distance from Switzerland

In the March edition of "Swiss Review", Ms Cigall Zitoun, from Israel, wrote that the Swiss abroad should not take part in referenda or elections on account of a lack of knowledge. She is mistaken. I have taken greater interest in affairs at home since being away. I never miss "rovorio". As a masterpiece requires you to stand some distance away to appreciate the finer detail, the same is also true of Switzerland.

WERNER BUCHER, ALMUÑÉCAR, SPAIN

Opposed to the right to vote and citizenship

I regularly listen to Radio DRS1 and consider myself to be well-informed. I nevertheless think differently to all my relatives and friends who live in Switzerland. This is why I'm also opposed to the right to vote for Swiss abroad. Neither do I support the retention of entitlement to Swiss citizenship down the generations.

VERENA BLENK, BUCHENBERG, GERMANY

"La Suisse n'existe pas" – has it come to this?

Last year I was involved in a matter in Singapore in which I exposed the fact that an official letter by a senior government official did not contain the truth. My work permit was subsequently not renewed after ten years in the country. As I had done no wrong in Singapore, I called upon the Swiss embassy to support me and to mediate. However, the embassy rejected my request on the grounds that any state has the right to expel an undesired person without providing justification. I think it is disgraceful that a Swiss representation can look on without acting while a Swiss citizen suffers an injustice.

The embassy's unwillingness to act is consistent with the servile policies pursued by Switzerland in recent times where the government distances itself from the result of a referendum (ban on minarets) and the Federal Council apologises to terrorists (Gaddafi affair). It is time for those who represent Switzerland to remind themselves that our forefathers did not win their freedom by kissing people's feet and for us to start showing some backbone rather than being the soft touches of world politics. If we continue as we are doing, we may one day have to accept that the Swiss Pavilion's shocking slogan at the 1992 World Expo in Seville has become a reality: "La Suisse n'existe pas" (Switzerland does not exist).

JÜRGE WALDER, NEW DELHI, INDIA

SWISS BANKS

The editorial team at "Swiss Review" has received a huge pile of letters from readers over recent months in which Swiss abroad express their disappointment, anger and outrage at the major banks, UBS and CS, and their new charges for Swiss living abroad.

As we have limited space available, we are unfortunately unable to publish all these letters in "Swiss Review". However, we wish to refer you to the two articles on this matter on page 23.

Swissness

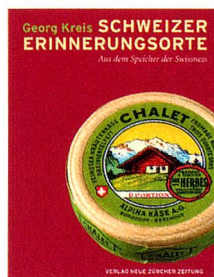
WHAT HAVE RÜTLI, TELL AND GUISAN got to do with Rösti, Toblerone and Swatch? We perceive them all as typically Swiss. In the words of Georg Kreis, they are "reference points of Swiss memory". Kreis, one of Switzerland's leading contemporary historians, takes us on a journey through the topography of Swiss memory in his book of the same name. It leads the reader into an extremely diverse, colourful and sometimes unfamiliar world. It deals with geographical locations, but not exclusively or primarily. "Schweizer Erinnerungsorte" does not concentrate on historical facts but rather on how these are transformed in the collective memory over time. It deals with phenomena such as reality, myth, legend, identity, hotly-contested symbolism and marketing.

Kreis' 26 milestones of Swiss memory take us into extremely diverse territories. The author features historical figures (Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Henri Guisan), mythical and fictional characters (William Tell, Heidi), places (Rütli, St. Gotthard), events (Battle of Marignano) and legendary items that are the embodiment of Swissness (Toblerone, Swiss army knife, Swatch). Kreis does not just look at the much-covered aspect of historical identification but also examines fault lines and controversial issues, such as the crumbling stronghold of banking confidentiality or Kaiseraugst as the pinnacle of the anti-nuclear power movement. And when it comes to Rösti, it is not just the potato dish that is explored, but also the "Röstigraben", the linguistic divide within Switzerland.

This book does not simply go over old ground or recount epic heroic tales. It shows how the crystallisation points of national memory develop over time and how different perspectives can be. For example, it discusses how a German song originally became a typically Swiss one, what chance events were necessary for it to enter national folklore and how it was not until 1915 that it became the "Beresinalied" (Beresina Song), which everyone associates with the sacrificial withdrawal of Napoleonic Swiss soldiers from Russia in 1812.

Georg Kreis makes subtle observations about his selection of topics and writes in his theoretical conclusion "that such a book cannot actually be produced under academic standards". Each area of recollection is too volatile, the reference points of national memory come and go, or at least fade, too dynamically. The selections should therefore be understood "in an experimental rather than a dogmatic sense", Kreis writes in the foreword. He chooses the form of the essay, which he combines with analysis and explanation, loosely made associations and a healthy dose of irony to produce a very readable book. Readers will also greatly appreciate the carefully designed graphic layout and the selection of photographs. This book is certainly an excellent read for anyone who believes they know Switzerland well.

JÜRGE MÜLLER



GEORG KREIS. "Schweizer Erinnerungsorte. Aus dem Speicher der Swissness". Verlag NZZ, Zurich 2010. 349 pages, CHF 44