

Zeitschrift: Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad
Herausgeber: Organisation of the Swiss Abroad
Band: 43 (2016)
Heft: 5

Artikel: A place of symbolism, a place of unity
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-907078>

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A place of symbolism, a place of unity

The Area for the Swiss Abroad is nestled within the bay in Brunnen and boasts incredible panoramic views. Now, one of Switzerland's most beautiful sites needs our support.

SILVIA SCHOCH

From the elegant, expansive park at the Area for the Swiss Abroad, you have a spectacular view of the green-blue shimmering lake and the Rütli. The view is breathtaking. Settled on the slopes of Seelisberg is the idyllic birthplace of the Confederation, surrounded by the white peaks of the Uri mountain range. The distant views of the Rütli and the Mythen have inspired countless poets, composers and painters. One such artist was Geneva-born Charles Giron, whose large murals have hung over the politicians at the National Council in the Federal Palace since 1902.

With the increase in steamship traffic in the early 19th century, the subsequent construction of the Axenstrasse and the opening of the Gotthard railway, Brunnen developed from a small fishing, boating and farming village into a tourist town with a booming hotel industry. Crowned rulers weren't the only ones with privilege; politicians and great artists such as Goethe and Wagner were also drawing inspiration from the views at this charming site. Queen Victoria wrote in her diary after a visit: "Nothing can exceed the beauty of the lake in any direction. The lake itself, that wonderful colour – varying from sapphire blue to emerald green – it's too glorious."

The Swiss Path, one of Switzerland's most popular hiking trails, also begins on the Rütli. It extends east along the wildly romantic Lake Uri down to Flüelen, reaching a powerful end at the Area for the Swiss Abroad

in Brunnen. The hiking trail was a gift from the cantons to mark the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation in 1991. Each of the 26 cantons is represented on a section of the path in the order of its entry into the Confederation. The length of the section depends on the number of inhabitants and symbolises the unity of the Confederation. The path begins with a 182-metre section representing the canton of Uri. The canton of Appenzell Innerrhoden is the shortest section, extending for 71 metres, while the canton of Zurich is the longest at six kilometres. Each and every Swiss national is symbolically represented by five millimetres of path along the 34.85 kilometres. The Area for the Swiss Abroad, as the end point of the Swiss Path, perfectly symbolises the sense of belonging that the Fifth Switzerland feels towards the Confederation.

A feeling of connection in the heart of Switzerland

The Area for the Swiss Abroad is also the starting point for the Waldstätterweg hiking trail. This younger trail is broken into seven stages and stretches through extraordinary landscapes and cultural and historical sites along the northern shore of Lake Lucerne, crossing the city of Lucerne before heading back to the Rütli. Together, the two trails form a perfect ring around the lakes. The location of the Area for the Swiss Abroad in the heart of Switzerland could not be more traditional, memorable or wonderful.



The creative impulse for including Swiss living abroad in the Swiss Path as part of the 700th anniversary of the Swiss Confederation can be attributed to the head of the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad in the 1980s. With the approval of the Council of the Swiss Abroad, the Directorate worked purposefully and with a clear vision. In January 1989, Walther Hofer, president of the newly-formed Foundation Board, celebrated by saying: "By joining forces, we made it happen!" Thanks to a global fundraising campaign amongst Swiss living abroad, half of the purchase price was raised. The other half was covered by the Federal Government. This allowed the participants to acquire the 5,400-square-metre peninsula on the western end of the Brunnen promenade. As a result, Swiss living abroad and those at home can share this beautiful piece of home. An impressive symbol of mutual unity – for the Swiss Abroad, a tie to their homeland, and for those living at home, a connection to those abroad.

As part of the celebration on 4 May 1991, the Area for the Swiss Abroad was officially handed over to the public. On National Day, the entire Federal Council gathered at the Area for the Swiss Abroad before attending National Day celebrations on the Rütli. The square was one of the main venues during the 1991 festivities, attracting numerous visitors from home and abroad. Large presentation boards showing "An Encounter with the Fifth Switzerland" informed the public about the Swiss diaspora.

Modernisation of the Area for the Swiss Abroad

The Foundation focused in the years that followed on the usability and upkeep of the square. A granite monument was erected and the presentation boards were brought up to date. Since its acquisition the square has been a popular destination for tourists and groups of all kinds. Events are held here several times a year, including village festivals, federal cel-

ebractions and open-air musicals, as well as Swiss Solidarity festivities and the SRF live broadcast "SF bi de Lüt".

After 25 years, the Area for the Swiss Abroad was forced to undergo a large restoration project. The top layer of the lawn was taken off and replaced with gravel turf to protect it and to ensure the continued possibility of hiring out the square, which is the sole source of income. Electrical installations had to be renewed. The Canton of Schwyz covered CHF 150,000 of the total cost of CHF 270,000. The commune of In-

Brunnen with both Mythen ranges. The Area for the Swiss Abroad in the foreground.

Photo: Axel B. Bott

genbühl in Brunnen, the Schwyz Kantonbank and participating companies donated more than CHF 60,000. Swiss citizens living abroad had donated CHF 35,000 by the end of June (see patrons list at www.auslandschweizerplatz.ch). To complete the restoration, we are still lacking CHF 25,000. As a result, the current Chairman of the Foundation Board, Alex Hauenstein, is sending out one last appeal for funds to the Swiss Abroad. "After the generous support received 25 years ago in acquiring the location, we hope to be able to complete the restoration phase with the help of the Swiss Abroad," he explains. "Swiss President Johann Schneider-Ammann visited us on 15 April in Brunnen as part of the 25-year anniversary celebration and inaugurated the Area for the Swiss Abroad. Now we need your support to help raise the remainder – through a personal donation or a Swiss club contribution. Thank you so much!"

Patrons will be listed on the donors list at www.auslandschweizerplatz.ch and will be issued with a receipt for donations of CHF 500 or more. Receipts for smaller amounts are issued upon request. Patrons donating CHF 5,000 or more will have their names engraved on the patrons' plaque.

SILVIA SCHOCH IS THE REGIONAL EDITOR OF "SWISS REVIEW" AND AN OSA DELEGATE

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