

**Zeitschrift:** Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad  
**Herausgeber:** Organisation of the Swiss Abroad  
**Band:** 50 (2023)  
**Heft:** 5

**Vorwort:** When continents collide  
**Autor:** Lettau, Marc

#### **Nutzungsbedingungen**

Die ETH-Bibliothek ist die Anbieterin der digitalisierten Zeitschriften auf E-Periodica. Sie besitzt keine Urheberrechte an den Zeitschriften und ist nicht verantwortlich für deren Inhalte. Die Rechte liegen in der Regel bei den Herausgebern beziehungsweise den externen Rechteinhabern. Das Veröffentlichen von Bildern in Print- und Online-Publikationen sowie auf Social Media-Kanälen oder Webseiten ist nur mit vorheriger Genehmigung der Rechteinhaber erlaubt. [Mehr erfahren](#)

#### **Conditions d'utilisation**

L'ETH Library est le fournisseur des revues numérisées. Elle ne détient aucun droit d'auteur sur les revues et n'est pas responsable de leur contenu. En règle générale, les droits sont détenus par les éditeurs ou les détenteurs de droits externes. La reproduction d'images dans des publications imprimées ou en ligne ainsi que sur des canaux de médias sociaux ou des sites web n'est autorisée qu'avec l'accord préalable des détenteurs des droits. [En savoir plus](#)

#### **Terms of use**

The ETH Library is the provider of the digitised journals. It does not own any copyrights to the journals and is not responsible for their content. The rights usually lie with the publishers or the external rights holders. Publishing images in print and online publications, as well as on social media channels or websites, is only permitted with the prior consent of the rights holders. [Find out more](#)

**Download PDF:** 31.01.2026

**ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, E-Periodica, <https://www.e-periodica.ch>**

**4 Focus**

Rockfalls and landslides are a growing challenge for Switzerland

**8 News**

Diplomat Alexandre Fasel takes over Swiss baton in difficult EU talks

**10 Society**

A place to sit down – benches are everywhere in Switzerland

**14 Report**

Switzerland's keenest voters

**News from your region****17 Switzerland in figures**

Lots of little Emmas

**18 Nature and the environment**

We are recycling more plastic, but we are also consuming more plastic

**20 Literature**

Jakob Vetsch's 100-year-old novel offers a window into the future

**22 Politics**

How does the "Fifth Switzerland" vote?

Fuelling the neutrality debate – the question of Swiss rapprochement with NATO

**24 Notes from the Federal Palace****27 SwissCommunity news**

The Council of the Swiss Abroad wants expatriates to have a stronger voice

**31 Discussion**

Cover photo: Brienz-Brinzauls narrowly escaped a huge rock avalanche in June 2023. The Grisons hamlet had been evacuated beforehand. Photo: Keystone

# When continents collide



When we visit the Swiss Alps, we see pastures, glittering mountain streams, steep cliffs and precipitous peaks. What we do not see are two tectonic plates colliding deep beneath our feet. The Alps were formed when the African continental plate came up against the Eurasian continental plate, thrusting the earth's crust upwards. Our present-day view above ground is but a snapshot of this ongoing geological process.

If we lived long enough, we would notice the Matterhorn growing by around 1,500 metres every one million years as the African and Eurasian plates continue to collide. Likewise, we would see how the outside elements shave more or less 1,500 metres off the top of the Matterhorn every one million years. This permanent give-and-take gets lost in the supposed here-and-now of immovable, unyielding, rock-solid Swiss mountains epitomising a country made in their image.

But this image is crumbling. It is not only our Alpine glaciers that are receding in real time. The mountains themselves seem more fragile. Dangerous rockfalls and landslides are a physical symptom of this malaise. They also undermine the myth of permanency and have an acute emotional impact.

We delve into this issue more closely in our lead article, with good reason following the one-million-cubic-metre avalanche of rocks that fell just short of the village of Brienz-Brinzauls this summer – the latest in a line of dramatic landslide events that include Randa in 1991, Gondo in 2000, and Bondo in 2017. Most recently at the end of August, a mass of earth and rock rolled down the slope above Schwanden in the canton of Glarus, destroying or burying more than half a dozen houses and barns – as if we needed further proof that our mountains are moving.

Apropos the Alps – anyone can sit down and enjoy the beautiful mountain scenery from a plethora of benches dotted around our country. Public benches tend to be positioned where the local tourist board thinks the best view is. They are a ubiquitous piece of outdoor furniture. Switzerland boasts myriad benches of different shapes and sizes – from sturdy to rickety, large to small, from bright red to natural and weather-worn – in every possible and impossible place. Read all about it in our article.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

"Swiss Review", the information magazine for the "Fifth Switzerland", is published by the Organisation of the Swiss Abroad.

