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Cover photo: Jura flag above Moutier, the Bernese town set to join the canton of Jura in 2026. Photo: Keystone

Cycling through Jura



Time for some history. Let's go back to 1815, the end of a tumultuous era that saw Napoleon redraw the map of Europe. The French had invaded Switzerland, establishing the short-lived Helvetic Republic. After Napoleon's defeat, it was the turn of the victorious European powers to redraw many of the continent's borders at the 1815 Congress of Vienna. The territory of Jura was added to Switzerland – or the canton of Berne, to be precise – as part of the Vienna settlement.

Many people in Jura soon felt they belonged to Switzerland – but not to Berne, for linguistic, religious and cultural reasons. Berne did nothing to help itself in this regard. Its politicians mostly looked down on their canton's new French-speaking pendant, calling it the 'wretched attic'. The 'Jura question' remained unresolved for the next one and a half centuries. Relations over the mountains got worse instead of better, and the threat of violence increased in the 1960s. For a while it had all the ingredients of a civil war.

Thankfully things turned out differently, and the years of strife are over. The decisive moment came in 1974, exactly 50 years ago, when Jura's three northern districts decided to split from the canton of Berne and form their own canton, culminating in the birth of Switzerland's youngest canton only five years later. Since then, Jura has had the right to shape its own future like all the other cantons in our country's federal system (see our lead article on page 4).

This owes much to the determination of people in Jura – but also to those outside Jura who increasingly wanted a just solution for all involved. An overwhelming 82 per cent of Swiss voters endorsed the new canton in 1978. And even in a Berne ceding half of the territory it won in 1815, the yes vote stood at almost 70 per cent.

These days, its Bernese neighbours regularly infiltrate Jura from across the mountains. Mainly at weekends and during holiday periods. Not to reclaim old cantonal territory, but because they love Jura and everything it offers. From dark forests and wide expanses, to steep cliffs, deep gorges and a proud, freedom-loving people with a rebellious streak – Jura is worth a visit. Our intrepid reporter cycled through Jura to investigate.

MARC LETTAU, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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