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f the fact that one of their chief aims is to bring Switzerland's diverse cultures together and build a bridge over what many believe is a growing divide between French- and German speaking Switzerland.

Great wrestling tradition

Those who had made the trip to the south-west corner of the country were almost all fans of wrestling, or schwingen as it is more popularly known in its heartland. Nyon itself has no great wrestling tradition, but the fine weather and free entrance ensured a large turnout by the local population. Some were drawn out of feelings of patriotism, but most out of curiosity.

"I had to come and see it. It's like being on another planet," said one woman, who admitted to feeling like a tourist, despite being in her own town.

"I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn about the culture of my fellow Swiss," another admitted.

"I came because I believe in the unity of this country. We have to renew our links with our German-speaking countrymen, so that we can find our purpose in the world again," one elderly gentleman from St Cergue, in the nearby Jura mountains explained as he looked at the Unspunnen stone, a potent symbol of Swiss alpine traditions, recently returned by Jura separatists who stole it 17 years ago.

Despite these language divisions, the Swiss president, Moritz Leuenberger, in his speech to the 30,000 people in the wrestling arena, said he was more concerned about the growing divide between rural and urban Switzerland.

Town and country

He said federal elections had increasingly revealed two opposing

parts of the country: "the Switzerland that wants to change and the Switzerland that would like things to remain the same". Leuenberger said town and country should "respect each other and meet each other". That was happening outside the arena, where farmers from Appenzell or the Emmental mingled – sometimes uneasily - with residents of Nyon, many of whom work in Geneva and Lausanne.

This meeting of the cultures was helped by a mixture of Swiss-German beer and Lake Geneva white wine, and non-stop music: alphorns from the Bernese Oberland, brass bands from nearby Gland, folk music from Graubünden and the fifes and drums typical of Geneva.

"There isn't just one Swiss culture. We are a federal country, and all the different cultures should be unified," said an alphorn craftsman from Aigle, in the mountains of canton Vaud.

"This kind of festival is important in bringing the people together," he told swissinfo.

by Roy Probert, SRI
26.08.2001

Schpiik you Englisch ?
'Blödelei à l'anglaise'
by N. La Roche & P. Hürzeler

I HAVE
YET A LITTLE
CHICKEN
WITH YOU
TO PLUCK

Snippets...

Woman pastor aims to shake up Geneva church

For the first time, a woman has been appointed Moderator of the Company of Pastors in Geneva – one of the highest posts in the Protestant Church. Isabelle Graesslé says she intends to use her position to make the church more receptive to the needs of society.

Switzerland affirms commitment to fight poverty in India

Switzerland has underscored its commitment to fight poverty in India, at an annual conference organised by the Swiss Development Agency in Basel.

Tourists to peer into 220 million years of history

The Swiss Alps have a story to tell. New parks have started opening across Switzerland with the aim of revealing the country's geological past – from when it was a desert to its period as an icy wasteland.



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Switzerland's prehistoric past on show in new museum

Switzerland's biggest archaeological museum has officially opened its doors to the public in Hauterive, near Neuchâtel. The institution offers a glimpse of the area's distant past.

Virus kills cancer tumours in mice

Scientists in Switzerland have discovered that a harmless human virus wipes out tumours in mice by prompting cancer cells to self-destruct.

Bat lovers sing the virtues of a maligned mammal

Conservationists throughout Switzerland launched their annual public relations campaign on behalf of the much-maligned bat recently. Bat Night was an attempt to persuade people that the world's only flying mammal is a cute little creature in need of protection.

Sun-loving cyclists wanted for race across Australia

Pedal power meets solar power in Australia when the World Solar Cycle Challenge gets underway in November. A Swiss team, with state of the art bikes, is looking for eight riders to take part in the 3,000 kilometre adventure.

Mountaineers celebrate arrival at Jungfrau summit

Seven Swiss and British climbers dressed in 19th-century climbing gear breathed a collective sigh of relief and toasted their success with champagne on Tuesday when they scaled the summit of the Jungfrau on the third leg of a 10-day mountaineering expedition.

US attacks could undermine many Swiss companies

The economic effects of last week's (11.9.2001) terrorist attacks on the most potent symbols of American economic and military power may be felt far beyond the borders of the United States. The global economy was already fragile; many Swiss companies now regard the future with even more uncertainty.

Water resources in the Alps need protecting

Scientists around the world have identified water shortage as one of the greatest problems of our time. Even in Switzerland, a hydrological paradise, experts are warning that the precious commodity should not be taken for granted.

Biologist wins science prize

A biologist at Neuchâtel University and four other European scientists have carried off this year's Körber award for their work in plant physiology. The prize, worth (SFr1.15 million), will be awarded later in October in Hamburg, Germany.

Hard-working Swiss urged to take siesta

The first business offering quiet siesta time has opened in the heart of Zurich. Stressed executives can now nap between important meetings at Restpoints, located on a quiet side street near Zurich's main train station.

Canadian circus brightens up autumn in Zurich

Canada's famed Cirque du Soleil has set up its tent in Wallisellen near Zurich to give the Swiss a taste of its unique repertoire of dance, acrobatics and humour.

Parliament on course to back UN membership

Parliament looks set to approve Swiss membership of the United Nations despite strong opposition from rightwing politicians, who say the move would compromise Swiss neutrality. Voters will have the final say at the ballot box next year.

Plant experts examine risks of herbal medicines

Plants offer a host of opportunities for treating many illnesses but they are not necessarily safer than synthetic drugs. An international symposium in Lausanne is looking at the potential and dangers of herbal medicines. Some 300 experts from 44 countries are taking part in this annual conference of the European Phytochemistry Society, which is being held at Lausanne University

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