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This and That Corner

The West

This region, comprising two cantons tucked around Lac de Neuchatel, is characterised by small-scale dairy villages and, of course, Gruyere cheese.



The cantons of Vaud and Fribourg divide into the Lowlands and the alpine foothills of French-speaking western Switzerland, with the valleys of the strangely contorted borders in the Broye Valley and their many enclaves of Catholics are a reminder of the time when the city-republics of Bern and Fribourg captured the former Savoy Vaud (which extended from Bieler See to lac Leman / Lake Geneva) in 1536.

At the time of the revolution, the areas captured by Fribourg - which had remained Catholic - did not want to be connected with the Protestant canton of Vaud for confessional reasons. This region, with its gentle hills and low mountains, its fields of waving corn, its green meadows and its spick-and-span towns has - if one discounts Morat (Murten in German) and Gruyeres (Greizer) - been spared many of the worst aspects of mass tourism.

Despite industrialisation, Fribourg remains the most markedly rural of Switzerland's cantons: one in six employed people works in agriculture (the figure was as high as 39 per cent in 1950), more than three times the number in Switzerland as a whole. The canton has its own breed of cattle, patriotically sporting the black-and-white colours of the canton, and two types of cheese: Gruyere and Vacherin, a fondue cheese. The language border is also a "cheese border": the French-Swiss part of Fribourg produces Gruyere, the Swiss-German part produces the large-holed Emmentaler.

Fribourg, founded as a Freie Burg in 1157 by Berchtold 1V of Zahringen, on a peninsula in the River Sarine, was bigger than both Bern and Zurich when it entered the Confederation, and in terms of prosperity it was easily on a par with Basel and Geneva. Trade and business flourished; the woollen cloth and leather the town produced were sought-after commodities.

After the Reformation - Fribourg stayed with the "old faith" - its economic power declined, even though the town managed to extend its dependencies, and it wasn't until the second half of the 20th century that Fribourg emerged from its somnolence and rapidly industrialised.

As an island of Catholicism in a Protestant land, the town went through a period of decline. The country was preparing to supply mercenaries to foreign princes (particularly to Their Most Christian Majesties of France), and the patrician upper classes became fossilised in class prejudice.

LEFT:

A cheesemaker from Moleson, near Gruyeres, whose dairy, dates from 1686.

The Song of Switzerland



As in German-speaking Switzerland, a rich cowherding culture has developed in the western alpine foothills, producing a long-standing tradition of folk music. The cowherd's melody became known as the Song of the Swiss and became famous around the world. The song with the dialect refrain "Lioba, lioba, por ario" recalls the Poya,

driving the cattle up to the alpine pastures.

It is supposed to be so evocative of life on the Alps that in former days it provoked an uncontrollable feeling of homesickness in Swiss mercenaries. So strong was their nostalgia on hearing the song that they would burst into tears. In 1621, a minister of the

king of France is said to have banned Swiss mercenaries serving in France from singing the cowherd's melody. But the melody proved so popular that it found its way into operas and operettas, which were performed across Europe and the United States throughout the 19th and 20th centuries.

Today, there are innumerable arrangements and piano renditions, libretti and arias containing the cowherd's melody. They all sing the praises of the rural Switzerland which the homesick mercenaries longed for, a way of life that in today's Switzerland is best summed up by picturesque Swiss dairy towns such as Gruyeres.

Source : *Insight Guides Switzerland*

Macaroni de Fribourg (serves six people)

Fry one medium onion and four cloves of garlic in butter until golden brown.

Add raw macaroni and mix well. Pour one bottle (700mls) of white wine over macaroni and boil on very low heat for 3/4 hour stirring often (as mixture will stick to bottom of pan). Add water when necessary.

When macaroni are cooked add 1 cup of ham (cut in little pieces), 1 cup of grated tasty cheese (preferably Gruyere) and 1 small bottle of cream. Stir until mixture is warm. Serve with lettuce.

Kasetomaten nach Freiburger Art (Cheese tomatoes from Fribourg)

Cut and empty eight tomatoes (use lid and seed for a tomato sauce). Mix 300gr of Gruyere cheese with two eggs, pepper and nutmeg, and 3/4 fill tomatoes. Place in a buttered oven dish and bake at 180C until cheese is melted.

Bon Appetit,

Lisette

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