

Zeitschrift: Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand
Herausgeber: Swiss Society of New Zealand
Band: 73 (2007)
Heft: [7]

Artikel: The first Swiss emigrants
Autor: Brühlmann, Trudi
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-944339>

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: 18.03.2026

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

The first Swiss emigrants

The first Swiss who decided to leave their home country were the Helvetians, in the year fifty-eight BC. Word had spread that the region of Southern France had a milder climate and, as the Helvetians' huts still had dirt floors and thatched roofs that weren't watertight, Southern France sounded like the place to be.

It was no mean task getting organised. Under their leader, Divico, three hundred and sixty eight thousand Helvetians left – men, women and children with all their belongings and their livestock in ox carts – and, to make sure nobody had second thoughts, they burnt their huts as they left: over four hundred villages in all.

The way was forward: go west – well, southwest. They travelled for many days to the land of their dreams. At nighttime they arranged their carts in a circle against unknown enemies and for comfort. They lit fires, cooked, talked and made plans about what to do in their new homeland. And at first, all went smoothly. They planned to follow the Rhone to the Mediterranean once they reached the Lake of Geneva, but Julius Caesar stopped them there and wouldn't allow them to pass through. He suggested they go home – and stay home. Yet the Helvetians were not to be discouraged so easily. They chose to make a detour via the Jura. This was a gruelling and time-consuming journey and when they finally reached the river Saone, Julius Caesar was there too, with a reinforced army. The Helvetians pleaded with Julius Caesar, but to no avail.

In the following battle of Bibracte 250'000 Helvetian men, women and children were killed. The remaining emigrants – wounded, bruised and disheartened – were forced to return to Helvetia, rebuild their burnt huts, and accept the Romans as their colonial rule.

Helvetia became a province in the Roman Empire, with Aventicum (Avenches) as Helvetian capital. Avenches is well worth a visit when you are in Switzerland next time: The amphitheatre is almost intact, and the wall with the watchtowers around the city and the aqueduct are still there, and quite impressive ruins of temples and a theatre, too. Some of the stones have ended up in medieval buildings, though and can be found in unlikely places.

The Roman occupation and administration had a positive side: Roman traders brought improved grain seed, which made farming more profitable. They also introduced cherries, chestnuts, peaches, plums and improved apple and pear varieties and nuts to Helvetian agriculture. Roman traders exported cheese, honey and wax from Helvetia to the rest of the empire and imported oil and wine. Roman officials lived in houses with mosaic floors, underfloor heating and baths. The indigenous Helvetians still lived in huts with dirt floors, but some worked as servants in Roman houses and learnt that there would be more sophisticated ways of living. *tb*

Hoffnung

*Es reden und träumen die Menschen viel
Von bessern künftigen Tagen,
Nach einem glücklichen, goldenen Ziel
Sieht man sie rennen und jagen.
Die Welt wird alt und wird wieder jung,
Doch der Mensch hofft immer Verbesserung.*

*Die Hoffnung führt ihn ins Leben hinein,
Sie umflattert den fröhlichen Knaben,
Den Jüngling lockt ihr Zauberschein,
Sie wird mit dem Greis nicht begraben:
Denn beschliesst er im Grabe den müden Lauf,
Noch am Grabe pflanzt er – die Hoffnung auf.*

*Es is kein leerer schmeichelnder Wahn,
Erzeugt im Gehirne der Toren,
Im Herzen kündigt es laut sich an:
Zu was Besserm sind wir geboren.
Und was die innere Stimme spricht,
Das täuscht die hoffende Seele nicht.*

Friederich von Schiller

YOUR SWISS CHEF, BERTA

TARANAKI'S TOP RESTAURANT
LODGE - CHALETs - FAMILY UNITS
FREE PHONE 0800 MOUNTAIN
(66 86 82)

www.mountainhouse.co.nz

Mountain House
MOTOR LODGE
Mount Egmont

FAERNWEH? HEIMWEH? WICHTIGI GSCHAEFTSTERMIN?

Looking for a travel consultant with over 22 years of experience in the industry that will meet your needs and with whom you can communicate in (Swiss)-German, French or English?

Looking for a travel consultant that travelled the world and can advise out of own experience knowing a lot of destinations personally?

Looking for someone to organise your trip back to Switzerland or Europe to visit the "rellies" as well as your holiday-, business-, group- and special event trips?

Try me!!

Daniela Suter,

UNITED TRAVEL on BRYCE and BARTON
Cnr Bryce and Barton Street / P.O Box 19263
HAMILTON
Phone: 07 838 1100 / Fax: 07 834 2032
Email: daniela@uth.co.nz



United Travel