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Bodensee Bulletin

Gruezi from Bodensee, where spring has sprung, the sun is warm, and we're settling into this way of being.

Arrival was the customary surprise. Roman, Margrit and Rösli were at the airport to meet us. We paused at our Hüsli just long enough to admire the Willkommen banner and Swiss and NZ flags and to connect the water and gas, then it was down to Roman and Margrit's and the gathered gang, bubbly, and Swiss meats, cheese and bread. Having been delivered to Wellington airport by Hans Buess and Trudi Brühlmann, it felt just like we'd been handed safely from one community of friends to another.



Church near Hagenwil

We came a little earlier this year, in the hope that I might see the glories of spring. And so it was. The evening trip from the airport was lovely enough, with the roadside and field trees in flower, and the Säntis snow pinkened with *Abendrot*. But that was only a foretaste. All around us in Altenrhein are farm orchards, with tall-stemmed apple and pear trees in various stages of flowering, standing in fields that are a mass of dandelions and other field flowers, in company with sun-grateful cows. The other day we took a *Blueschtfahrtli* - the ritual country drive to admire the blossoms - through our neighbouring canton Thurgau. We were just in time, because the

farmers were out taking the first cut for hay - and the fields full of flowers were disappearing as we watched. How good that smell is though! News: this year Switzerland will follow Germany and Austria and spray the apple trees for fire-blight.

You see more at this time of year, too. Many trees and shrubs were still sparsely covered with leaves, so views that were generally obscured were open - and you can see the balls of mistletoe deco-



Mani gathering Bärlauch

rating the willow trees along the Rhein. And it's time to gather the spring edibles! We biked to the forest on the other side of the Alte Rhein where the entire ground is covered in Bärlauch. We gathered a couple of bags full, and have been enjoying them cooked like spinach. The young nettles are delicious too, though a little more hazardous to gather. Mani makes a great nettle soup!

But all is not perfect in paradise. We were greeted our first morning by neighbour Maria, with a tragic face. Maria loves birds, and had been honoured when a pair of blackbirds built their nest in her garden and were feeding four young there. Then - horror - that morning there was an empty nest, and little decapitated corpses of the young birds on the ground. The *Marder* had come in the night. I could not bring myself to say (even if I had had the language) that maybe the marder was just feeding its young too....

I've not seen a marder yet - it's bigger than a stoat but smaller

than a cat - though one year, one had broken in through our ceiling vents and decided that would be a nice warm place for winter. This year there is also a broken vent cover, and I have seen Maria looking suspiciously at it, wondering if we have been harbouring the culprit. But there is silence in the ceiling, so if we've had an inhabitant, it's gone.

Getting here was "interesting" this year. We'd decided to have a night-and-morning stopover in Seoul, and a little city-tour. The weather had other ideas. A storm meant we had to land at Gimpo airport on the other side of Seoul. A couple of hours waiting around, an hour or so being bussed across Seoul to clear immigration at Incheon airport, then being bussed from Incheon to the hotel, meant a 2.30am bedtime.

Morning held another "interesting" experience. We'd nominated when we'd like breakfast. Come that time, we got a phone call - "breakfast is ready". How nice, we thought, but we weren't quite ready. Five minutes later, another call - yes, we're on our way down. We arrived to find two plates of bacon and eggs and French fries, beautifully presented, but stone cold. Perhaps the Koreans share with the Swiss a sense of precision timing. They were definitely nonplussed when a German-New Zealander co-traveller arrived (again to a cold plate) and said he was vegan - and he didn't like French fries much either. Must be a cultural assumption that European travellers will like a particular breakfast menu, served at a pre-specified time!

Which reminds me of another problem in paradise - pommes frites! The European Cup Soccer planners think there will not be enough potatoes in the whole of Switzerland to make the piles of chips the fans will want. The Potato Board is having to import them for the chip-makers to get frying.

Looking at the issues the rest of the world is facing, how blessed are we!