

**Zeitschrift:** Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Herausgeber:** Swiss Society of New Zealand  
**Band:** 76 (2010)  
**Heft:** [8]

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**Download PDF:** 04.02.2026

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As I write we're starting the process of transition back to NZ, and by the time you're reading this we'll be home, to a lovely early spring we hope!

As we talk about that with friends, we talk about the joys of two springs in a year - two asparagus seasons, two blossom bursts, two experiences of the days lengthening instead of shortening - but there is another side... two spring cleanings! Of course we do a thorough clean before we put the Kapiti house and the Altenrhein *husli* to bed - but even then there's the re-entry cleaning to do.

We had two August 1sts this year too ... our normal Community affair shifted to Saturday July 31st to make it easier for people who needed to get to work on the Monday, and then we drove up to Arosa on Sunday for the "real" 1st August. It was marvellous! First a trip up Hörnli on the cable car - amazing to see people strap very expensive mountain bikes to the cars, and then bike down helter-skelter.

There were many folk riding up and walking down too. That was a gentle walk compared to the one made later in the day by the intrepid climbers who set the *höhenfeuer* - the Swiss-cross shaped fires on top of the surrounding mountains, and later walked down in the dark. Late that night we could see these *fackelträgers* (torch carriers) coming down what, in the light of the next morning, were sheer tracks down the mountain-sides. Such a dramatic sight - and there was more!

In fact, the whole evening was a festival of sound and light - starting with the band marching in, led by our Arosa friend, and including his two boys of saxophone and clarinet - then the *yodelchörli* - then the lights joined the music. On the *Obersee* there is a fountain with some 10 metres length of jets which was lit with many coloured spotlights. We watched a good twenty minutes of constantly changing patterns of light and water, all to music, and finishing with the *wasserspiel* lit only with red and white patterns as the *Nationalhymne* played. Then of course, there were fireworks to top things off, reflecting brilliantly in the lake.

The sense of national pride was reflected in quite a different setting later in August, with the Ausland-Schweizer (Swiss Abroad) Congress in St Gallen, where Mani was your delegate, deputising for Othmar Hebler. There's a piece about the discussions elsewhere in this *Helvetia* - but the experience was something else! The sitting of the *Rat* was in the Assembly Room of Regional Government for Canton St Gallen - an elegant chamber in the Klosterhof, with wonderful wall and ceiling paintings. My eyes strayed to them often, when my mind needed a break from struggling to follow the discussions. Many of the delegates and presenters were equally fluent in French and High German, and moved between them with ease. The two women providing simultaneous translation (French to German, German to French) were brilliant. We talked with them at lunch-time, marvelling at their skill (and yes of course, they were both equally fluent in English). I

veered wildly between emotions of pride in what I could understand and total inadequacy at what I couldn't - oh the woes of a mono-lingual education!

Language is an ongoing issue - many delegates would have liked the option of English translation,



Appenzeller Entertainment at Auslandschweizer dinner

and some also wanted Spanish. There's a worry that second and third generations of Swiss families overseas are going to find themselves increasingly disenfranchised if the business of Swiss Abroad is conducted only in French and German, and voting information continues to be similarly limited - but it is good to see that the SwissCommunity.org website (recommended!) has the English option, and the issue is being acknowledged.

On the domestic front, it's been tincture-making season for Mani. The backs of our bikes have been often decorated with bunches of herbs gathered along the way, and the shelves filled with bottles of tinctures drawing in the 80% alcohol you can get in the supermarket in Austria. We're leaving friends and family well-supplied with remedies for aches and ailments.

For me, it's been book-making. There's some great software from blurb.com which you can use to design and create your book, and upload it to their site - and then - whoopee - back it comes as a real book! I've published one I had in mind for ages - and just finished a mammoth job with sister-sort-of-in-law Inge, making a book of her paintings.

Of course, the major topic with our neighbours has been the Christchurch earthquake. It's odd to be following the news from so far away, grateful that the losses are only of property, yet realising what a huge event it is. It's times like these when distance does seem to matter. There's a sense of detachment, almost of alienation, from something which is significant in our story of ourselves as New Zealanders. I find myself wondering what the differences, beyond the obvious, will be. What cracks might appear in the fabric of society, and what strengthening will follow?

Ah well, we'll soon be connecting again, and hearing how things are with you all. Till then....